



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 23 FEB 2022

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Events, Opportunities

HEADLINE	02/21 Spokane Co. sheriff details firing of deputy
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/sheriff-ozzie-knezovich-explains-firing-deputy-craig-chamberlin/293-9b11d8ce-4310-476f-a5b8-3d75166d7d81
GIST	<p>SPOKANE, Wash. — Spokane County Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich held a press conference on Monday to further explain why he chose to fire Deputy Craig Chamberlin. He was fired last week after an investigation into his conduct.</p> <p>Knezovich fired former Deputy Craig after an internal investigation in November. It stemmed from a reference letter Chamberlin wrote for a man charged with possession of child pornography.</p> <p>Knezovich said he was not fired for writing that letter, but rather because he believes Chamberlin lied about the circumstances surrounding it.</p> <p>“Not only has he lied to us in this investigation, he is lying to you in the media,” Knezovich said.</p> <p>The Sheriff claims Chamberlin lied about not knowing the man he wrote the reference letter for was charged with possession of child pornography. But Chamberlin insists he only knew there was an active investigation after confirming with a sex crimes detective.</p> <p>“I did not ask what type of case, he did not specify what type of case, he told me there was an active case and it was a Spokane Police Department case,” Chamberlin. said. “And that’s all I wanted to know.”</p> <p>According to Sheriff Knezovich, Chamberlin’s story changed in all three interviews during the internal investigation.</p> <p>“It was almost impossible for me to keep it all straight,” Knezovich said.</p> <p>But Chamberlin said that’s not the case.</p> <p>“I was completely 100% forthcoming about this entire process,” he said “For one, it had absolutely nothing to do with me, it wasn’t my investigation.”</p> <p>The Sheriff said Chamberlin’s record with the sheriff’s office includes three total internal investigations. Chamberlin is adamant the Sheriff had political motives for firing him--since he is now running for Sheriff.</p> <p>But Knezovich said that isn’t true because he’s spent a decade trying to salvage Chamberlain’s career—which included several years of serving as the Sheriff’s public information officer.</p> <p>"If he tried to salvage me, if I was that much of a hindrance, that much of an issue to the Spokane County Sheriff's Office, why was I the face of the department?" Chamberlin said.</p> <p>Knezovich said it’s a possibility Chamberlin would still be a deputy had he not lied. But, he would have still enforced a temporary suspension if that had been the case.</p> <p>KREM 2 submitted a public records request for documents relating to Chamberlin’s internal investigations. We will share our findings once we get those copies.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 SKorea cases skyrocket; omicron wave
SOURCE	https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2022/02/23/Kim-Boo-Kyum-COVID-19-coronavirus-Omicron-record-cases/6481645593753/

GIST	<p>SEOUL, Feb. 23 (UPI) -- South Korea saw its daily tally of COVID-19 cases spike to more than 170,000 on Wednesday, shattering previous highs and prompting Prime Minister Kim Boo-kyum to call for calm as the Omicron variant roars through the population.</p> <p>The Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, also known as the KDCA, reported 171,452 new infections on Wednesday, toppling the previous record of 104,814 from Sunday.</p> <p>Confirmed cases have been soaring since the Omicron variant became the dominant strain in South Korea last month, roughly doubling on a weekly basis since late January. Officials have estimated that the current wave could reach 270,000 daily cases at its peak by early March.</p> <p>However, Kim said Wednesday that the rising counts are no cause for alarm due to the relative mildness of the Omicron variant.</p> <p>"Although awareness and implementation of antivirus measures should not be eased, there is absolutely no reason to fear or panic just because of the number of confirmed cases," the prime minister said at a government COVID-19 response meeting Wednesday.</p> <p>Kim pointed to research released by the KDCA on Monday that found the rates of both severe cases and deaths caused by Omicron to be just a quarter that of the Delta variant. According to a study of more than 67,000 patients since December, the fatality rate of Omicron is 0.18%, compared to Delta's 0.7%.</p> <p>Omicron's death rate is twice as high as the seasonal flu, Kim said, but it drops to equal or even lower with booster doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.</p> <p>South Korea's vaccination rates are among the world's highest, with more than 86% fully vaccinated and almost 60% receiving a booster shot. Children below 12 years of age have not yet been eligible for vaccination, but on Wednesday, the country's food and drug ministry approved the Pfizer vaccine for children aged 5-11.</p> <p>South Korea has shifted gears in its COVID-19 strategy to face the far more contagious Omicron, moving away from its highly centralized "3T" model -- test, trace and treat -- to a home-care system that looks to preserve hospital bed capacity and limit disruptions to the economy.</p> <p>Authorities loosened some social distancing regulations last week, extending business hours for restaurants and bars from 9 p.m. to 10 p.m. and removing the requirement for contract-tracing check-ins at most establishments. Personal gatherings are still limited to six people under the latest guidelines, which remain in effect until March 13.</p> <p>"The previous methods of tracing the source of infection cannot keep up with Omicron," Kim said. "We need to focus our medical capabilities on high-risk groups to minimize serious illness and death."</p> <p>Severe cases climbed Wednesday to 512, up from around 200 last week, and the country added 99 deaths to bring the overall toll to 7,607.</p> <p>Kim said that the situation was being managed "stably" and predicted that the Omicron variant would be "the last hurdle in the recovery of daily life."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Sanctions effects on Russia banks?
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/western-sanctions-banks-only-scratch-surface-fortress-russia-2022-02-22/
GIST	LONDON/NEW YORK, Feb 22 (Reuters) - The United States, the European Union and Britain announced new sanctions on Russia on Tuesday after Moscow's recognition of two separatist regions in Ukraine as independent entities.

Chief among their targets: Russian banks and their ability to operate internationally.

Yet the impact of the new sanctions is likely to be minimal. Western governments - for now - are preferring to keep the much larger sanctions packages that they have planned in reserve should the crisis escalate.

It means Russian bankers or their Western counterparts with exposures to the country won't be losing much sleep.

Indeed, U.S. banks are not expecting global sanctions to have a major impact on American bank businesses or spark contagion risk, given lenders have little exposure to the Russian economy, said three executives familiar with industry thinking.

Here's how the banks are being targeted and which measures might hit harder:

WHAT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED SO FAR?

European foreign ministers agreed to sanction 27 individuals and entities, including banks financing Russian decision-makers and operations in the breakaway territories.

The package of sanctions also includes all members of the lower house of the Russian parliament who voted in favour of the recognition of the breakaway regions.

Britain imposed sanctions on Gennady Timchenko and two other billionaires with close links to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and on five banks - Rossiya, IS Bank, GenBank, Promsvyazbank and the Black Sea Bank. [read more](#)

The lenders are relatively small and only military bank Promsvyazbank is on the Russian central bank's list of systemically important credit institutions.

Bank Rossiya is already under U.S. sanctions from 2014 for its close ties to Kremlin officials.

Washington imposed sanctions on Promsvyazbank and VEB bank.

It also ramped up prohibitions on Russian sovereign debt, which U.S. President Joe Biden said meant the Russian government would be cut off from Western financing. The U.S. Treasury said it was extending current prohibitions to cover participation in the secondary market for bonds issued after March 1 by Russia's Central Bank and other entities.

Russian dollar bonds extended their losses after the announcement on U.S. sanctions, with longer-dated issues slipping to record lows trading in the mid-90s, data showed. , The premium demanded by investors to hold Russian debt over safe-have U.S. Treasuries blew out to 329 basis points, the widest since the COVID market rout in spring 2020.

WHAT WILL THE IMPACT BE?

For now - minimal.

Russia's large banks are deeply integrated into the global financial system, meaning sanctions on the biggest institutions could be felt far beyond its borders.

But the new sanctions focus on smaller lenders.

The measures targeting banks are not yet as extensive as those imposed after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, although many of those sanctions remain in place.

Then the West blacklisted specific individuals, sought to limit Russia's state-owned financial institutions' access to Western capital markets, targeted the bigger state lenders, and imposed widespread limits on the trade of technology.

Britain's new measures refrained from imposing limits on the biggest state banks, cutting off capital for Russian companies, or ejecting other prominent so-called Russian oligarchs from Britain.

Shares in Russia's biggest banks, Sberbank (SBER.MM) and VTB soared after the state-controlled groups escaped the sanctions.

Analysts say Russian institutions are better able to cope with limited sanctions than eight years earlier, and Russian state banks have cut their exposure to Western markets.

Russia has since 2014 diversified away from U.S. Treasuries and dollars - the euro and gold account for a bigger share of Russia's reserves than do dollars, according to a January report from the Institute of International Finance.

Russia has some strong macroeconomic defences too, including abundant hard currency reserves of \$635 billion, oil prices near \$100 a barrel and a low debt-to-GDP ratio of 18% in 2021.

"The ones today were not that significant," said Samuel Charap, a senior political scientist at the nonprofit, nonpartisan RAND Corporation, about the U.S. sanctions.

"The question is where we go from here," he said. "I am increasingly pessimistic, and I think there is a high probability of significant further Russian military action and I think in that case, we are likely to see some of the really qualitatively more devastating measures than in the past."

WHAT MIGHT COME NEXT?

The EU has said it is ready to impose "massive consequences" on Russia's economy but has also cautioned that, given the EU's close energy and trade ties to Russia, it wants to ratchet up sanctions in stages.

Officials consider Tuesday's measures as a first round.

Beyond lenders that do business directly with the breakaway regions, it's not clear yet when or whether the EU will hit the biggest banks.

Washington has prepared a raft of measures including barring U.S. financial institutions from processing transactions for major Russian banks by cutting "correspondent" banking relationships, sources told Reuters last week.

Disabling international payments would hit hard.

Those measures, however, may be kept in reserve.

Russia's Sberbank and VTB would face American sanctions if Moscow proceeds with its invasion of Ukraine, a senior U.S. administration official told reporters.

If such banks did get targeted, U.S. banks could face retaliation, said Charap, who pointed to cyber attacks as a potential weapon that could be used.

WHAT WOULD HIT HARDEST?

What the region's banks and Western creditors fear most is the possibility that Russia is banned from a widely used global payment system, SWIFT, which is used by more than 11,000 financial institutions in over 200 countries.

Such a move would hit Russian banks hard but the consequences are complex. Banning SWIFT would make it tough for European creditors to get their money back and Russia has been building up an alternative payment system.

Data from the Bank of International Settlements (BIS) shows that European lenders hold the lion's share of the nearly \$30 billion in foreign banks' exposure to Russia.

WHICH FOREIGN BANKS ARE MOST EXPOSED?

Europe's banks - particularly those in Austria, Italy and France - are the world's most exposed to Russia, and have been on high alert should governments impose new sanctions.

Italian and French banks each had outstanding claims of some \$25 billion on Russia in the third quarter of 2021, according to BIS figures. Austrian banks had \$17.5 billion. That compares with \$14.7 billion for the United States.

Among the most exposed lenders is Austria's RBI (RBIV.VI), which has big operations in Russia and Ukraine. It has said "crisis plans" would come into effect if things deteriorate. Its shares closed down 7.5% on Tuesday.

Many foreign banks have, however, significantly reduced their exposure to Russia since 2014, making some bankers less concerned about the threat of sanctions.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Vaccine supply outstrips demand first time
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/covax-vaccine-supply-outstrips-demand-first-time-2022-02-23/
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS/LONDON, Feb 23 (Reuters) - The global project to share COVID-19 vaccines is struggling to place more than 300 million doses in the latest sign the problem with vaccinating the world is now more about demand than supply.</p> <p>Last year, wealthy nations snapped most of the available shots to inoculate their own citizens first, meaning less than a third of people in low-income countries have been vaccinated so far compared with more than 70% in richer nations.</p> <p>As supply and donations have ramped up, however, poorer nations are facing hurdles such as gaps in cold-chain shortage, vaccine hesitancy and a lack of money to support distribution networks, public health officials told Reuters.</p> <p>In January, COVAX, the global vaccine programme run by Gavi and the World Health Organization (WHO), had 436 million vaccines to allocate to countries, according to a document published in mid-February.</p> <p>But low-income nations only asked for 100 million doses for distribution by the end of May - the first time in 14 allocation rounds that supply has outstripped demand, the document from the COVAX Independent Allocation of Vaccines Group said.</p> <p>Asked to comment, a Gavi spokesperson said COVAX was now in a situation where there was enough current supply to meet demand, but acknowledged that the roll-out of vaccines was an issue in several less developed nations.</p>

"We will only close the vaccine equity gap once and for all if we are able to help countries roll out vaccines rapidly and at scale," the spokesperson said.

Vaccines that are not assigned by COVAX in this round can be allocated again later.

While wealthy countries are opening up their economies, the WHO and other public health experts warn that the slow roll-out of vaccines in poorer regions will give the coronavirus a chance to mutate again and potentially create new variants.

FRIDGES AND FREEZERS

The low demand for vaccines in the January allocation is partly explained by recent increases in supplies. COVAX has already assigned tens of millions of doses to be delivered in the first quarter and delivered its billionth dose in January.

Officials involved in vaccine distribution said that meant countries were reluctant to take on more doses that they would not be able to use.

A summit to address distribution challenges is taking place on Wednesday in Abuja, Nigeria, convened by the African Union's Africa Vaccine Delivery Alliance with WHO, Gavi and others rolling out shots across Africa attending.

There had been hopes that African countries would be able to administer billions of doses of COVID-19 vaccines given their experience in dealing with deadly diseases from Ebola to malaria.

But two years into the crisis, a survey seen by Reuters by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in January on the equipment needed to ramp up vaccine distribution highlighted some of the challenges.

It found "critical gaps" across 44 of the African Union's 55 member states: 24 countries said they needed fridges, 18 were in need of deep freezers, 22 required walk-in freezers and 16 did not have sufficient walk-in cold rooms.

A UNICEF spokesperson said more than 800 ultra-cold chain freezers had already been delivered to nearly 70 countries, as well as 52,000 fridges.

"We are continuing to help countries identify and close cold chain capacity gaps as supply increases and governments adjust national-level vaccination targets in response," she said.

DISINFORMATION AND FUNDING

The problem is particularly acute for COVAX because the Pfizer-BioNTech (PFE.N), shot that needs to be kept super-cold has replaced AstraZeneca's (AZN.L) vaccine as the main one being offered by the global programme.

Some African countries, such as Burundi and Guinea, have gaps at every point in the cold chain, from national level to local distribution centres, the UNICEF survey showed.

The findings are likely to underscore growing concerns that COVAX did not invest quickly enough in infrastructure and equipment for countries it was delivering vaccines to.

The issue is exacerbated by a lack of funding and because countries have not had enough notice of deliveries - particularly donations - making it harder for them to plan vaccination campaigns, public health officials have said.

Officials involved in the distribution of vaccines in Africa also said more focus needed to be placed on communicating the importance of getting vaccinated - and addressing disinformation.

	<p>"Communication is one of the biggest issues ... if we don't get the messaging right, everything else we are doing is futile," one of the officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity.</p> <p>Money has also started to dry up for global initiatives as richer nations seek to move on from COVID.</p> <p>Gavi says it has only raised \$195 million out of the \$5.2 billion it has asked for this quarter. The money is used to procure and ship vaccines, as well as provide syringes and delivery support in countries.</p> <p>Efforts to distribute tests and therapeutics, such as the new antivirals, are facing similar cashflow issues, according to Philippe Duneton, executive director of Unitaid.</p> <p>"There is not a lot of money left from what we have received," he told Reuters, referring to therapeutics particularly.</p> <p>"There is around \$100 million, but we need more to make access to these drugs, including access to tests, in a way that is affordable for the international community."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Truckers 'People's convoy' DC Beltway
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-truckers-plan-pandemic-protest-inspired-by-canadian-counterparts-2022-02-23/
GIST	<p>ADELANTO, Calif., Feb 23 (Reuters) - Taking a cue from demonstrations that paralyzed Canada's capital city for weeks, U.S. truckers on Wednesday plan to embark on a 2,500-mile (4,000-km) cross-country drive towards Washington to protest coronavirus restrictions.</p> <p>Organizers of the 'People's Convoy' say they want to "jumpstart the economy" and reopen the country. Their 11-day trek will approach the Beltway around the U.S. capital on March 5 "but will not be going into D.C. proper," according to a statement.</p> <p>The Pentagon on Tuesday said it had approved 400 D.C. National Guard troops to "provide support at designated traffic posts, provide command and control, and cover sustainment requirements" from Feb. 26 through March 7.</p> <p>About 50 large tactical vehicles were also approved to be placed at traffic posts.</p> <p>Brian Brase, a truck driver who is one of the organizers, said regardless of where the trucks stop "we're not going anywhere" until the group's demands are met. Those demands include an end to vaccine and mask requirements.</p> <p>In Canada, pandemic-related protests choked streets in the capital Ottawa for more than three weeks and blocked the busiest land crossing between Canada and the United States - the Ambassador Bridge connecting Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario - for six days.</p> <p>Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked rarely used emergency powers to end the protests, and Canadian police restored a sense of normalcy in Ottawa over the weekend.</p> <p>"We plan to stay a while and hope they don't escalate it the way Trudeau did with his disgusting government overreach," Brase said from Adelanto, California, where the convoy will begin, about 80 miles (130 km) northeast of Los Angeles.</p> <p>Brase said he expected thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, would participate.</p> <p>Organizers bill the convoy as nonpartisan, trucker-led, and supported by a wide range of ethnic minorities and religious faiths.</p>

	<p>Economic growth in the United States - as in other countries - was brought to a juddering halt by the imposition of lockdowns to control the spread of the coronavirus. The economy has boomed since the government pumped in trillions in relief - it grew 5.7% in 2021, the strongest since 1984, the Commerce Department reported in January.</p> <p>Meanwhile, unemployment stands at 4%, close to the 3.5% rate of February 2020, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. But headwinds related to strained supply chains and inflation remain.</p> <p>"It is now time to reopen the country," the protest organizers said in a statement.</p> <p>Most states are already easing restrictions. In California, where the convoy begins, universal mask requirements were lifted last week and masks for vaccinated people are required only in high-risk areas such as public transit, schools and healthcare settings.</p> <p>But the protesters want an immediate end to the two-year-old state of emergency, which Governor Gavin Newsom has extended.</p> <p>Nationwide, new COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations due to the coronavirus have plummeted from all-time highs hit a month ago, but nearly 2,000 people per day are still dying and the number of total deaths is closing in on 1 million since the pandemic began.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Taiwan casts wary eye at China
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/china-taiwan-russia-putin/2022/02/23/id/1058035/
GIST	<p>Taiwan is nervous that Beijing may take advantage of a distracted West to ramp up pressure on the island amid the crisis in Ukraine, but there have been no unusual maneuvers by Chinese forces in recent days, officials in Taipei say.</p> <p>The government, always on alert to what they view as Chinese provocations, last month set up a Ukraine working group under the National Security Council. China views Taiwan as its own territory and has stepped up military activity near the self-governing island during the past two years.</p> <p>President Tsai Ing-wen told a meeting of the working group on Wednesday that Taiwan must increase its surveillance and alertness on military activities in the region and tackle foreign misinformation, though she did not directly mention China.</p> <p>Although Taiwan's government says the island's situation and that of Ukraine's are "fundamentally different," Tsai has expressed "empathy" for Ukraine's situation because of the military threat the island faces from China.</p> <p>Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu warned in two foreign media interviews this month that they were watching very closely to see whether China would take advantage of the Ukraine crisis to attack.</p> <p>"China may think about using military action against Taiwan at any moment, and we need to be prepared for that," he told Britain's ITV News.</p> <p>A senior Taiwan official familiar with the government's security planning told Reuters that the chances of a sudden uptick of military tension are "not high," but that Taipei has been watching closely for any unusual Chinese activities.</p> <p>The person pointed to the People's Liberation Army's joint military drills in areas between Taiwan's northeast and near the Miyako Strait close to Japan's southern islands, which have become more frequent in the past month or so.</p>

The drills included fighter jets, bombers and warships and were meant to increase pressure on Japan, the official said, who declined to be identified due to the sensitivity of the matter.

A Japanese Defence Agency spokesperson declined to comment.

Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesperson for China's Taiwan Affairs Office, said on Wednesday that Taiwan's government in concert with the West was using Ukraine to "maliciously hype up" military threats and whip up anti-China sentiment.

WESTERN CONCERN

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Saturday that if Western nations failed to fulfill their promises to support Ukraine's independence, it would have damaging consequences worldwide, including for Taiwan.

Two Taiwan-based diplomatic sources told Reuters that President Xi Jinping's primary focus at the moment was preparing for a tricky once-every-half-decade congress of the ruling Communist Party this year, where he will cement a historic third term in office.

"Once that's done, he will be able to focus once more on Taiwan," said one of the sources, who spoke on condition of anonymity as neither was authorized to speak to the media.

Taiwan, which rejects Beijing's sovereignty claims, has lived under the threat of Chinese invasion since the defeated Republic of China government fled to the island in 1949 after losing a civil war to the Communists.

Su Chi, a former head of Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council under the previous administration of President Ma Ying-jeou, said Taiwan, like Ukraine, was caught between two great powers.

Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin deal with their respective territorial claims very differently, added Su, who runs the Taipei Forum think tank.

"So far Xi has been firm but gradual, not lightening fast like Putin."

One Western security official familiar with policy planning toward China said Beijing was most likely looking at how the Ukraine situation developed in terms of sanctions on Russia.

"It's probably seen as a laboratory by China, on what they might face in a Taiwan contingency," the official said, referring to how Western countries may react to a Chinese attack on the island.

The Taiwan official said there were some similarities between Putin's and Xi's military moves in recent years, pointing to Russia's "grey zone" tactics towards Crimea before annexing it in 2014. Taipei has called China's frequent air missions near the island a "grey zone" tactic.

"Rather than conjecturing whether Xi would restrain actions before the party congress, it is more realistic to analyze its daily military activities and make preparations accordingly," the official added.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Climate activists block access airports
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/science-business-germany-traffic-blockades-f590dcecbd59b51507b1e3f8b4a4a0c3
GIST	<p>BERLIN (AP) — Climate activists on Wednesday blocked roads leading to Germany's three biggest airports, gluing themselves to the ground before police arrived.</p> <p>Members of the group Uprising of the Last Generation said they wanted to disrupt cargo and passenger traffic at the airports in Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin.</p>

	<p>The group has demanded that the government take measures to end food waste. It argues that throwing away vast amounts of usable food contributes to hunger and climate change.</p> <p>Past protests involving the blocking of roads and ports have drawn criticism from officials across the political spectrum.</p> <p>“Blocking highways or even airports isn’t helpful, it’s wrong,” Environment Minister Steffi Lemke told weekly Die Zeit. It quoted Lemke saying that anger over Germany’s failure to meet its emissions targets didn’t justify such protests.</p> <p>The blockades are reminiscent of the protests last year by the climate action group Insulate Britain, which obstructed many main highways and roads in London and other U.K. cities.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 What lies beneath: polluted base, vets ill?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/business-health-travel-environment-and-nature-lifestyle-c1078dd520322f2a4130e2f7077b7892
GIST	<p>FORT ORD NATIONAL MONUMENT, Calif. (AP) — For nearly 80 years, recruits reporting to central California’s Fort Ord considered themselves the lucky ones, privileged to live and work amid sparkling seas, sandy dunes and sage-covered hills.</p> <p>But there was an underside, the dirty work of soldiering. Recruits tossed live grenades into the canyons of “Mortar Alley,” sprayed soapy chemicals on burn pits of scrap metal and solvents, poured toxic substances down drains and into leaky tanks they buried underground.</p> <p>When it rained, poisons percolated into aquifers from which they drew drinking water.</p> <p>Through the years, soldiers and civilians who lived at the U.S. Army base didn’t question whether their tap water was safe to drink.</p> <p>But in 1990, four years before it began the process of closing as an active military training base, Fort Ord was added to the Environmental Protection Agency’s list of the most polluted places in the nation. Included in that pollution were dozens of chemicals, some now known to cause cancer, found in the base’s drinking water and soil.</p> <p>Decades later, several Ford Ord veterans who were diagnosed with cancers — especially rare blood disorders — took the question to Facebook: Are there more of us?</p> <p>Soon, the group grew to hundreds of people who had lived or served at Fort Ord and were concerned that their health problems might be tied to the chemicals there.</p> <p>The Associated Press interviewed nearly two dozen of these veterans for this story and identified many more. AP also reviewed thousands of pages of documents, and interviewed military, medical and environmental scientists.</p> <p>There is rarely a way to directly connect toxic exposure to a specific individual’s medical condition. Indeed, the concentrations of the toxics are tiny, measured in parts per billion or trillion, far below the levels of an immediate poisoning. Local utilities, the Defense Department and some in the Department of Veterans Affairs insist Fort Ord’s water is safe and always has been.</p> <p>But the VA’s own hazardous materials exposure website, along with scientists and doctors, agree that dangers do exist for military personnel exposed to contaminants.</p>

The problem is not just at Fort Ord. This is happening all over the U.S. and abroad, almost everywhere the military has set foot, and the federal government is still learning about the extent of both the pollution and the health effects of its toxic legacy.

AP's review of public documents shows the Army knew that chemicals had been improperly dumped at Fort Ord for decades. Even after the contamination was documented, the Army downplayed the risks.

And ailing veterans are being denied benefits based on a [25-year-old health assessment](#). The CDC's [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry](#) concluded in 1996 that there were no likely past, present or future risks from exposures at Fort Ord.

But that conclusion was made based on limited data, and before medical science understood the relationship between some of these chemicals and cancer.

This is what is known:

Veterans in general have higher blood cancer rates than the general population, according to VA cancer data. And in the region that includes Fort Ord, veterans have a 35 percent higher rate of multiple myeloma diagnosis than the [general U.S. population](#).

Veterans like Julie Akey.

Akey, now 50, arrived at Fort Ord in 1996 with a gift for linguistics. She enlisted in the Army on the condition that she could learn a new language. And so the 25-year-old was sent to the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, and lived at Fort Ord as a soldier. By then the base was mostly closed but still housed troops for limited purposes.

"It was incredibly beautiful," she said. "You have the ocean on one side, and these expansive beaches, and the rolling hills and the mountains behind."

What she didn't know at the time was that the ground under her feet, and the water that ran through the sandy soil into an aquifer that supplied some of the base's drinking water was polluted. Among the contaminants were cancer-causing chemicals including trichloroethylene, also known as the miracle degreaser TCE.

She'd learn this decades later, as she tried to understand how, at just 46 and with no family history of blood cancers, she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

"No one told us," she said.

Despite the military's claims that there aren't any health problems associated with living and serving at Fort Ord, nor hundreds of other shuttered military bases, almost every closure has exposed widespread toxic pollution and required a massive cleanup. Dozens have contaminated groundwater, from Fort Dix in New Jersey to Adak Naval Air Station in Alaska. Fort Ord is 25 years into its cleanup as a federal Superfund site, and it's expected to continue for decades.

To date, the military has only acknowledged troops' health could have been [damaged by drinking contaminated water at a single U.S. base: Camp Lejeune, North Carolina](#), and only during a 35-year window, between 1953 to 1987.

Servicemembers there were found by federal epidemiologists to have higher mortality rates from many cancers, including multiple myeloma and leukemia. Men developed breast cancer, and pregnant women tended to have children with higher rates of birth defects and low birth weight. Like Fort Ord, Camp Lejeune began closing contaminated wells in the mid-'80s.

Soldiers are often stationed at different bases during their years of military service, but neither the Defense Department nor the VA has systematically tracked toxic exposures at various locations.

Fort Ord's primary mission was training troops who deployed to World Wars I and II, Korea and Vietnam. It supported several thriving small towns on a piece of coastal land the size of San Francisco. Soldiers and their families lived in houses and apartments connected to its water system, and civilians worked at its airfields, hospitals and other facilities.

In the course of their work preparing for battle, [they spilled solvents into the base's drains](#), sloughed chemical sludge into underground storage tanks and discarded 55-gallon drums of caustic material in the base landfill, according to a [1982 hazardous waste inventory report](#).

Curt Gandy, a former airplane mechanic, recalls being routinely doused with toxic chemicals from the 1970s to the 1990s. He said he hosed down aircraft with solvents, cleaned engine parts and stripped paint off fuselages without any protection. There were barrels of toluene, xylene, jet fuel and more.

"It gets on your body, it gets in your face, you get splashed with it, and we're using pumps to spray this stuff," he said. "It's got 250 pounds of pressure and we're spraying it into the air and it's atomized."

On Fridays, crews would forklift barrels of the used flammable liquids down a bumpy sandy road, dumping solvents, paint and metal chips onto the hulks of broken aircraft and tanks at a burn pit. One weekend a month, airfield firefighters would light up the toxic sludge and then douse the roaring fires with foam.

In 1984, an [anonymous caller tipped off Fort Ord's officials](#) that "approximately 30 55-gallon drums," containing about 600 gallons of a "solvent-type liquid" had been illegally spilled there, [an Army report said](#). The state, which [ordered a cleanup two years later](#), determined the Army had mismanaged the site in a way that threatened both ground and surface waters.

And the burn pit wasn't the base's only polluted site.

In 1991, when the Army began investigating what had actually been disposed of at the base's dump overlooking Monterey Bay, officials told the public the trash was similar to what one would find in the landfill of any small city, according to [transcripts of community meetings](#).

While it's true that much of the trash going into that dump came from nearby houses — food scraps, old furniture, busted appliances, even gasoline — the Army officials who spoke at the meetings made no mention of the toxic stew of paints and solvents that today are banned from open landfills. The solvent TCE was among dozens of [pollutants that scientists discovered as early as 1985](#) and today still exists in concentrations above the legal limit for drinking water in the aquifer below, according to local and federal water quality reports.

"The water from the aquifer above leaks down into the aquifer below and the pollution just gets deeper," said Dan O'Brien, a former board member of the Marina Coast Water District, which took over the Army's wells in 2001. "The toxic material remains in the soil under where it was dumped. Every time it rains, more of the toxin in the soil leeches down into the water table."

The Army's early tests of Fort Ord's wells near the landfill [detected levels of TCE 43 separate times from 1985 to 1994](#). The VA told the AP the contamination was "within the allowable safe range" in areas that provided drinking water.

But [18 of those TCE hits exceeded legal safety limits](#); one reading was five times that amount. It's unclear how long and at what concentrations TCE may have been in the water before 1985. And TCE was only one problem. The EPA identified more than 40 "chemicals of concern" in soil and groundwater.

"It was not recognized that it was so toxic back then, and they threw it on the ground after use. They used a ton of it. Now, it's the most pervasive groundwater contaminant we have," said Thomas Burke, an

environmental epidemiologist at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and a former EPA official.

Contractors initially brought in to clean up the contaminated groundwater were warned not to tell community members what they found in their drinking water, specifically not the news media or even local public agencies, [according to a 1985 military memo](#).

At the time, there were elevated levels of TCE in the aquifers, yet the military assured the public the drinking water was safe.

“There never have been any test results that indicate that Fort Ord’s water was unsafe,” [an Army official](#) told [several local papers](#) in August 1985.

Since then, advances in medical science have increased the understanding of the dangers of the chemicals at Fort Ord. TCE, for example, is now a [known human carcinogen](#), and epidemiological studies indicate a possible link between TCE and blood cancers like non-Hodgkin lymphoma and multiple myeloma.

TCE “circulates in the body real effectively when you breathe it or drink it,” Burke said. “It’s related strongly to kidney cancer, the development of kidney cancers and suspected in several other cancers.”

Julie Akey spent years collecting names of people who lived at Fort Ord and were later diagnosed with cancers. Her database eventually grew to more than 400 people, nearly 200 of which were listed as having those blood cancers.

Akey spent most of her Fort Ord days in a classroom, studying Arabic. But in the afternoons and evenings, she’d run along the coastline and do military drills. At home, she watered her small vegetable plot with the base’s water supply, harvesting the fresh crops to chop into salads.

She filled her water bottle from the tap before heading out each morning, and thought nothing of the showers she took each night. After all, she was among hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the base’s history who did the same.

She fell ill in Bogota, Colombia, in 2016. She’d left the military after nearly six years as a translator and interrogator to become a State Department foreign service officer, a dream job that gave her the chance to travel the world with her twin sons. Quite suddenly she became fatigued with a persistent ache in her bones. Soon she was in screaming pain.

When the Colombian doctors couldn’t find a cause, Akey was sent to the U.S. for what she assumed would be a quick trip. She left plants on the mantle, food in the refrigerator and clothes at the dry cleaners.

She never went back.

After weeks at the Cleveland Clinic, she was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer that attacks plasma cells, and is most often detected in [elderly African American men](#). The disease is treatable but has no cure.

“I was a zombie,” she said. “I cried all the time.”

Worried about keeping her government health insurance, she applied to work at a nearby airport as a part-time baggage checker while recovering from a bone marrow transplant.

“You don’t ever think you’re going to have cancer at 46. Why? Why do I get this crazy cancer that no one’s ever heard of? So, I started looking for answers,” she said.

Akey meticulously reviewed her assignments in Spain and Haiti, her stints in Guyana, Ecuador, Nigeria, at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Gordon in Georgia. And Fort Ord — a federal Superfund site.

“I think that that was my answer,” she said.

Akey read as much as she could about the base, and searched for others like her. She combed through EPA reports, water records, newspaper clippings and obituaries. She scoured social media, and built a database of sick veterans; it’s grown to 491 people to date.

Soon after Akey started a Facebook group in June of 2019, she connected with Tracy Lindquist. Lindquist’s husband, Scott, was stationed at Fort Ord for two years in the 1980s. He has three types of rare cancers, including multiple myeloma. He had a stem cell transplant a few years back, and has been on chemotherapy since 2014.

He has health insurance through the VA, but when he applied for disability payments that would have allowed him to stop working, Tracy said, his claims were denied — twice.

Until May, he drove a van for \$11 an hour, shuttling people with developmental disabilities from their group homes to daylong workshops. Sometimes he had to change the oil or do maintenance, and the physical labor was hard on him, Tracy said. Then he started having seizures, and could no longer drive. He tried working three days a week, cleaning the vans and assisting clients, but he couldn’t even manage that. Earlier this month, he was approved for Social Security disability payments.

“Scott hardly ever left the base and he drank water like a fish, and that water was contaminated,” Tracy said. “I know there are people out there, they’ve lost legs and arms, and they need to take care of those people who got hurt in action. But this is a disability, too.”

Debi Schoenrock, who lived around the corner from Akey’s house at Fort Ord, was diagnosed in 2009 with multiple myeloma at 47. Like Akey, she was stunned. She was a military wife and lived on base for three years, from 1990 until 1993. She’d never been sick, and had no family history of cancer. Nobody said anything about toxic substances, she said.

[In 1991, the Army surveyed dozens of community members](#) to find out what they knew about groundwater contamination at Fort Ord. Everyone said they were concerned, and no one reported receiving any information from the Army.

Five years later, a federal report assured them that “because the concentration of contamination detected in the past in Fort Ord and Marina drinking water wells was low and the duration was not over a lifetime (70-years), those exposures will not likely result in adverse health effects.”

Decades on, such health assessments at Fort Ord and other military bases are outdated and based on old science, said Burke of Johns Hopkins.

“A 1990s health assessment is a weak thing,” he said.

Peter deFur, a biologist who worked as an EPA-funded scientific adviser at the base, agrees. The report “stated that there could not be future health effects, which is not possible to know,” he said.

While the federal government has established acceptable standards for the amount of TCE in drinking water, no level of such carcinogens are safe, according to the Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974. Complicating matters, TCE vaporizes easily, and when it is inhaled it can be even more dangerous, [according to a National Toxicology Program assessment](#).

William Collins, who is leading Fort Ord’s cleanup for the Army, said he’s never heard of anyone sickened by pollution at the base. Like the VA, Collins points to the 25-year-old study that found no likely human risks from exposure at Fort Ord. He said anyone can request a new, updated study if they want, [which is what happened at Camp Lejeune in 2017](#).

Federal health officials told AP no one has done so at Fort Ord.

LeVonne Stone and her husband, Donald, were living at Fort Ord when the base shut down. LeVonne had a civilian job there, and Donald had been in the 7th Infantry Division.

During the base conversion, Stone formed the Fort Ord Environmental Justice Network, demanding answers about the toxic materials and the impact on friends and neighbors, who, at the time, made up the only significant Black community on California's central coast. But she said military and state officials were determined to develop the valuable coastal property and, in her mind, didn't want to deal with the pollution.

"We tried telling everybody, the state, the federal, everybody," she said. "There's so many people who have died of cancer. They have not done anything for the community locally. ... They just turned their heads, they looked the other way."

There have been efforts in recent years to force the government to come to grips with the effects of the military's environmental abuses.

Numerous bills have been introduced seeking to compensate veterans sickened by exposure to toxic chemicals during their service, but nothing significant has passed.

Last year President Joe Biden called on the VA to examine the impact of burn pits and other airborne hazards. In November, [the White House announced](#) that soldiers exposed to burn pits in a handful of foreign countries, who developed any of three specific ailments — asthma, rhinitis and sinusitis — within 10 years can receive disability benefits.

The Board of Veterans Appeals has ruled repeatedly that there's no presumptive service connection for any disease — stroke, cancer, vision problems, heart disorders and more — due to exposure to toxic chemicals at Fort Ord, [according to an AP review of claims](#).

The VA told AP that it is updating how it determines links between medical conditions and military service, and encourages veterans who believe their ailments may have been caused by their service to file a claim.

Burke, the Johns Hopkins epidemiologist, said doing a study of health effects of living at Fort Ord now is difficult, if not impossible. "We can't reproduce what happened on that base in California," he said. "We need to admit we exposed people to a huge amount of toxic materials."

And it's not just a matter of exposures in the past.

Today Fort Ord is home to a small public university; some students live in former Army housing and spend weekends "Ording," exploring the abandoned, and contaminated, military buildings. More than 1.5 million mountain bikers, hikers and horseback riders a year enjoy some 85 miles of trails in a vast national monument. Brand-new neighborhoods with million-dollar homes are being built across the street from the Superfund landfill cleanup. Local water officials say drinking water is now pulled from other areas and treated before being delivered to customers.

Former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta grew up next to Fort Ord, went through basic training on the base and now runs a nonprofit institute there.

Too often, he said, the military does whatever is necessary at its bases to ready troops for war, "and they don't spend a lot of time worrying about the implications of what will happen once they leave."

Panetta said the military is abandoning communities, leaving huge messes to clean up.

“I think that they have every right to ask the question whether or not whatever physical ailments they may have was in part due to the failure to provide proper cleanup,” Panetta said. “And in those situations, there is liability. And somebody has to take care of people who have been adversely impacted.”

For Akey and other veterans with cancer, it’s a matter of accountability. Health insurance, disability benefits and an acknowledgment of wrongdoing, she said, “isn’t asking for too much.”

“You’re not just serving for six years, like me, and then you’re out,” she said. “If you’ve been given cancer, that’s a life sentence.”

On a recent foggy morning, Gandy, the former airplane mechanic, walked past the rusting hangar at the old airfield where he used to work. The single-landing strip and buildings are now the Marina Municipal Airport. But much of the legacy military infrastructure remains, including sheds with old paint cans, an oil separator the size of a school bus and disconnected nozzles and hoses.

Gandy became an outspoken activist along with Levonne Stone, and also founded community groups to maintain pressure on the military to clean up the site.

His group repeatedly sued the Army, but a judge agreed with Defense Department attorneys who said the claims were moot because a rigorous cleanup was underway.

Gandy, now 70, said he talked to the base commanders, every mayor and health and safety officer. Twenty-five years later, Gandy’s comments — captured in videos and transcripts of contentious community meetings — seem prescient.

“I told them, ‘If we do what we need to do now, nobody will know that we did the right thing. But if we do it wrong, they’re going to know, because in about 20 years people are going to start dying,’” he said.

AP obtained a roster of Gandy’s co-workers on a single day at the airfield in 1986. There were 46 pilots and welders, mechanics and radio engineers. Today, he was told, almost a third of them are dead, many of cancers and rare diseases, some in their 50s.

He knew three former colleagues had died, not 13. “I feel terrible,” he said, tearing up. “It breaks my heart. Those guys were good guys and they deserved better.”

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HEADLINE	02/23 Omicron leads to Covid herd immunity?
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/coronavirus-pandemic-health-lifestyle-public-health-c64f8ba0e7885e4686e13a4d76ff49b9
GIST	<p>Is omicron leading us closer to herd immunity against COVID-19?</p> <p>Experts say it’s not likely that the highly transmissible variant — or any other variant — will lead to herd immunity.</p> <p>“Herd immunity is an elusive concept and doesn’t apply to coronavirus,” says Dr. Don Milton at the University of Maryland School of Public Health.</p> <p>Herd immunity is when enough of a population is immune to a virus that it’s hard for the germ to spread to those who aren’t protected by vaccination or a prior infection.</p> <p>For example, herd immunity against measles requires about 95% of a community to be immune. Early hopes of herd immunity against the coronavirus faded for several reasons.</p> <p>One is that antibodies developed from available vaccines or previous infection dwindle with time. While vaccines offer strong protection against severe illness, waning antibodies mean it’s still possible to get infected — even for those who are boosted.</p>

	<p>Then there's the huge variation in vaccinations. In some low-income countries, less than 5% of the population is vaccinated. Rich countries are struggling with vaccine hesitancy. And young children still aren't eligible in many places.</p> <p>As long as the virus spreads, it mutates — helping the virus survive and giving rise to new variants. Those mutants — such as omicron — can become better at evading the protection people have from vaccines or an earlier infection.</p> <p>Populations are moving toward “herd resistance,” where infections will continue, but people have enough protection that future spikes won't be as disruptive to society, Milton says.</p> <p>Many scientists believe COVID-19 will eventually become like the flu and cause seasonal outbreaks but not huge surges.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Europe braces for further strife
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-europe-russia-moscow-kyiv-626a8c5ec22217bacb24ece60fac4fe1
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Europe braced for further confrontation Wednesday and Ukraine urged its citizens to leave Russia after tensions escalated dramatically when Russia's leader got the OK to use military force outside his country and the West responded with a raft of sanctions.</p> <p>Hopes for a diplomatic way out of a new, potentially devastating war appeared all but sunk as the U.S. and key European allies accused Moscow on Tuesday of crossing a red line in rolling over Ukraine's border into separatist regions — with several calling it an invasion.</p> <p>The top U.S. diplomat canceled a meeting with his Russian counterpart; Kyiv recalled its ambassador and considered breaking all diplomatic ties with Moscow; dozens of nations further squeezed Russian oligarchs and banks out of international markets; Germany halted a lucrative pipeline deal; and the U.S. repositioned additional troops to NATO's eastern flank bordering Russia.</p> <p>After weeks of trying to project calm, Ukrainian authorities signaled increasing concern on Wednesday. The Foreign Ministry advised against travel to Russia and recommended anyone there leave immediately, saying Moscow's “aggression” could lead to a significant reduction in consular services.</p> <p>The head of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council called for a nationwide state of emergency — subject to parliamentary approval. Oleksiy Danilov said it will be up to regional authorities to determine which measures to apply, but they could include additional protection for public facilities, restrictions on traffic, and additional transport and document checks.</p> <p>Already, the threat of war has shredded Ukraine's economy and raised the specter of massive casualties, energy shortages across Europe and global economic chaos.</p> <p>Even as the conflict took a new, dangerous turn, leaders warned it could still get worse. Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet to unleash the force of the 150,000 troops massed on three sides of Ukraine, while U.S. President Joe Biden held back on even tougher sanctions that could cause economic turmoil for Russia but said they would go ahead if there is further aggression. Sanctions are key because the West has ruled out taking on Russia militarily.</p> <p>Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged Western leaders not to wait.</p> <p>“We call on partners to impose more sanctions on Russia now,” he wrote on Twitter on Wednesday. “Now the pressure needs to step up to stop Putin. Hit his economy and cronies. Hit more. Hit hard. Hit now.”</p>

Responding defiantly to the steps already taken, Russian ambassador in the U.S. Anatoly Antonov retorted that “sanctions cannot solve a thing” in a statement on Facebook. “It is hard to imagine that there is a person in Washington who expects Russia to revise its foreign policy under a threat of restrictions.”

In Ukraine’s east, where an eight-year conflict between Russia-backed rebels and Ukrainian forces has killed nearly 14,000 people, violence also spiked again. One Ukrainian soldier was killed and six more sustained injuries after shelling by the rebels, Ukrainian military said. Separatist officials reported several explosions on their territory overnight and three civilian deaths.

Since last Friday, when separatist leaders in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions announced mass evacuations into Russia, more than 96,000 residents of the separatist areas have crossed the Russian border.

After weeks of rising tensions, Putin took a series of steps this week that dramatically raised the stakes. First, he [recognized the independence of those separatist regions](#). Then, he said that recognition extends even to the large parts of the territories now held by Ukrainian forces, including the major Azov Sea port of Mariupol.

Finally, he asked for and was granted permission to use military force outside the country — effectively formalizing a Russian military deployment to the rebel regions.

Still, Putin suggested there was a way out of the crisis, laying out three conditions: He called on Kyiv to recognize Russia’s sovereignty over Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, to renounce its bid to join NATO and partially demilitarize.

But it was unclear if there was actually any room for diplomacy since the first two demands had been previously rejected by Ukraine and the West as non-starters.

The Russian leader remained vague when asked whether he has sent any Russian troops into Ukraine and how far they could go. “I haven’t said that the troops will go there right now,” Putin responded, adding that “it’s impossible to forecast a specific pattern of action — it will depend on a concrete situation as it takes shape on the ground.”

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HEADLINE	02/23 Rise non-Covid deaths hits life insurers
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/rise-in-non-covid-19-deaths-hits-life-insurers-11645576252
GIST	<p>U.S. life insurers, as expected, made a large number of Covid-19 death-benefit payouts last year. More surprisingly, many saw a jump in other death claims, too.</p> <p>Industry executives and actuaries believe many of these other fatalities are tied to delays in medical care as a result of lockdowns in 2020, and then, later, people’s fears of seeking out treatment and trouble lining up appointments.</p> <p>Some insurers see continued high levels of these deaths for some time, even if Covid-19 deaths decline this year.</p> <p>In earnings calls for the past two quarters, Globe Life Inc., GL -1.03% Hartford Financial Services Group Inc., HIG -0.31% Primerica Inc. PRI -0.83% and Reinsurance Group of America Inc. RGA -1.06% were among insurers noting higher non-Covid-19 deaths, compared with pre-pandemic baselines.</p> <p>“The losses we are seeing continue to be elevated over 2019 levels due at least in part, we believe, to the pandemic and the existence of either delayed or unavailable healthcare,” Globe Life finance chief Frank Svoboda told analysts and investors earlier this month.</p>

Among the non-coronavirus-specific claims are deaths from heart and circulatory issues and neurological disorders, he said. “We anticipate that they’ll start to be less impactful over the course of 2022 but we do anticipate that we’ll still at least see some elevated levels throughout the year,” he said.

Primerica executives similarly cautioned in their fourth-quarter call about outside numbers of non-Covid-19 deaths in 2022. “Some of these will be the result of delayed medical care or the increased incidence of societal-related issues, such as the increased prevalence of substance abuse,” Chief Financial Officer Alison Rand said in an email interview.

From early stages of the pandemic, many medical professionals have raised concerns about Americans’ [untreated health problems](#), as Covid-19 put stress on the nation’s healthcare system.

Trade group American Council of Life Insurance said the pandemic in 2020 drove the [biggest annual increase](#) in death benefits paid by U.S. carriers since the 1918 influenza epidemic, totaling billions of dollars. The hit to the industry’s bottom line has been less than initially feared, however, because many victims have been older people who typically have smaller policies, if any coverage.

Still, [Covid-19 and other excess deaths](#) have cut into many carriers’ quarterly earnings, especially as deaths linked to the Delta variant increased for people in their working years with employer-sponsored death benefits. “Earnings impacts have been material and there still appears to be some Covid-19 discount, but investors are starting to look through mortality claims costs,” said Andrew Kligerman, a stock analyst with Credit Suisse Securities.

Industrywide, death-benefit claims usually vary only slightly year-to-year, so the recent increases are outside the norm.

Non-Covid-19 excess deaths jumped in last year’s third quarter, after negligible or modest counts in earlier quarters, some life insurers said. Those numbers line up with results from an ongoing Covid-19 survey of 20 of the nation’s leading sellers of group-life insurance to employers by the Society of Actuaries Research Institute.

In the third quarter, the survey shows, incurred claims counts were 37.7% higher than a pre-pandemic baseline, with a nearly 50-50 split between claims directly tied to Covid-19 and those that weren’t, according to R. Dale Hall, managing director of research at the society, a professional organization. The group is still assessing fourth-quarter data.

The Science Behind Long Covid

New studies offer clues about who may be more susceptible to long Covid, a term for lingering Covid-19 symptoms. WSJ breaks down the science of long Covid and the state of treatment. Illustration: Jacob Reynolds for the Wall Street Journal

The third-quarter non-Covid-19 excess claims were 19%, compared with 18.7% for Covid-19 claims, Mr. Hall said. Non-coronavirus-specific excess claims hadn’t topped 6.4% in previous quarters.

In discussing third-quarter results with analysts, Hartford Financial Chief Executive Christopher Swift said the company had “experienced higher levels of non-Covid excess mortality during the quarter,” including heart, stroke and cancer causes of death.

He said the company’s experience with such claims “has been very bouncy over the last six quarters so I don’t see a trend per se,” beyond those seeming “to indicate maybe a second-order effect with Covid and people not taking care of themselves.” The insurer is one of the nation’s biggest group-benefits providers.

At nonpublicly traded OneAmerica Financial Partners, another group-life-insurance seller, claims for working-age adults ran at about 140% of a pre-pandemic baseline during the third quarter, CEO J. Scott Davison said.

	<p>About two-thirds of these excess deaths are Covid-19-specific, he said. Of the remainder, in addition to deaths driven by deferred medical care, Mr. Davison’s team believes that some may stem from earlier Covid-19 infections. He cited scientific research indicating that the virus may pave the way for future medical complications, so survivors may “later die from the toll Covid has taken on their bodies.”</p> <p>The impact on the cost of life insurance from Covid-19 both directly and indirectly is unclear. Some insurers say they are repricing group-life contracts modestly on the assumption that the virus will be around at least through 2022. Those contracts are typically repriced every couple of years. Meanwhile, insurers are still trying to determine what implications there may or may not be on long-term mortality.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Navies maneuvering in Med, Black Sea
SOURCE	https://news.usni.org/2022/02/22/russian-navy-cruisers-positioned-to-counter-u-s-french-and-italian-carrier-groups-in-the-mediterranean
GIST	<p>Three Russian guided-missile cruisers have been arrayed across the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to counter three NATO carrier strike groups, causing concern in the Pentagon, a U.S. defense official told USNI News on Tuesday.</p> <p>As of Monday, the three Slava-class cruisers were operating in and around the Aegean Sea – RTS Moskva (121) in the Black Sea, RFS Varyag (011) south of Italy and RTS Marshal Ustinov (055) off the coast of Syria, near Russia’s naval base in Tartus.</p> <p>Moskva is based in the Black Sea, while Marshal Ustinov traveled from the Northern Fleet and Varyag from the Pacific Fleet. Ustinov and Varyag entered the Mediterranean from opposite ends earlier this month.</p> <p>The three 11,500-ton Slavas were designed around launchers that can hold 16 SS-N-12 Sandbox anti-ship cruise missiles – each about the size of a telephone pole. Developed in the 1970s, the Slavas and the Sandboxes were designed to take on U.S. and NATO aircraft carriers by overwhelming them with a barrage of high-speed cruise missiles to sink ships.</p> <p>The position of the cruisers around the Aegean is a complication for the U.S., Italian and French carrier strike groups that have been operating in the Mediterranean the last several weeks.</p> <p>USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-75), its escorts and Carrier Air Wing 1 have been tasked by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin since late December to remain on station in the region, as tensions between the West and Russia have been enflamed over Russian troops massed at the Russian border. Italian Navy F-35B aircraft carrier ITS Cavour (CVH-550) and French Navy carrier FS Charles de Gaulle (R 91) and their escorts are also operating in the Mediterranean.</p> <p>As the Russians have massed naval assets in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, the U.S. has surged additional guided-missile cruiser and destroyers to U.S. 6th Fleet. As of Tuesday, the U.S. has about a dozen guided-missile warships operating in the region, USNI News understands.</p> <p>Four East Coast guided-missile destroyers – USS Donald Cook (DDG-75), USS Mitscher (DDG-57), USS The Sullivans (DDG-68) and USS Gonzalez (DDG-66) – left the U.S. last month as independent deployers.</p> <p>“Throughout their deployment, they will participate in a range of maritime activities in support of the U.S. 6th Fleet and our NATO allies,” the Navy told USNI News.</p> <p>Those ships joined the forward-deployed USS Ross (DDG-71), USS Roosevelt (DDG-80), USS Porter (DDG-78) and USS Arleigh Burke (DDG-51), and the escorts of the Harry S. Truman CSG.</p>

	<p>While the Russian weapons appear imposing, the Aegis cruisers and destroyers have more sophisticated missile defense systems that outmatch the 1970s and 1980s-era Russian weapons. The risk to the U.S. and NATO ships is if the missile defenders are overwhelmed with the number of weapons the Russians fire and the U.S. and NATO ships run out of interceptors, USNI News understands.</p> <p>Last week, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said the U.S. Navy was prepared to interact with the Russian Navy in the region.</p> <p>“We operate in and around the Russians and the Chinese all the time. So this is nothing new,” he said on Friday when asked about the Russian cruisers by reporters.</p> <p>“Given this current situation, the chance for miscalculation is greater. That’s why we train to a very high standard so that when we find our ships in situations like this the [commanders] that we act in a way that’s not provocative and that we communicate very clearly that we’re not cowboys out there. Our intentions are to be responsible professionals out there.”</p> <p>Meanwhile, as a response to Russia’s declaration that Ukraine regions Donetsk and Luhansk are independent republics, the Pentagon is sending more forces to NATO’s eastern front.</p> <p>These forces include an infantry battalion of 800 troops heading to the Baltics, the repositioning of eight F-35 Lighting II Joint Strike Fighters further east, 20 AH-64 attack helicopters moving to the Baltics region and 12 AH-64 helicopters heading to Poland, according to a senior defense official.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Russia warns over Nord stream 2 pause
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/22/business/nord-stream-2-germany-russia/index.html
GIST	<p>London (CNN Business)The West showed Tuesday it was ready to target Russia's huge energy industry — even at the risk of hurting itself — after Moscow ordered troops into parts of eastern Ukraine.</p> <p>Germany said it was halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline following Moscow's actions in eastern Ukraine on Monday.</p> <p>"With regard to the latest developments, we need to reassess the situation also with regard to Nord Stream 2. It sounds very technocratic but it is the necessary administrative step in order to stop certification of the pipeline," Chancellor Olaf Scholz said in Berlin.</p> <p>The 750-mile pipeline was completed in September but has not yet received final certification from German regulators. Without that, natural gas cannot flow through the Baltic Sea pipeline from Russia to Germany.</p> <p>The United States, the United Kingdom, Ukraine and several EU countries have opposed the pipeline since it was announced in 2015, warning the project would increase Moscow's influence in Europe.</p> <p>Nord Stream 2 could deliver 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year. That's more than 50% of Germany's annual consumption and could be worth as much as \$15 billion to Gazprom, the Russian state owned company that controls the pipeline.</p> <p>As Russia's biggest gas customer, Germany had tried to keep Nord Stream 2 out of global politics. But Berlin found it ever harder to defend the project as its allies debated how to punish Moscow should it order an invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to order troops into eastern Ukraine put the German government in a difficult position. US officials have made clear that they would move to suspend Nord Stream 2 in the event of a Russian invasion, without offering specifics on how that would be accomplished.</p>

Gazprom is the sole shareholder in Nord Stream 2 but 50% of the finance was provided by five European energy companies, including Wintershall and Uniper of Germany. The other financial backers are Britain's Shell ([RDSA](#)), Engie ([EGIEY](#)) of France and OMV ([OMVJE](#)) of Austria.

Gas prices are jumping. What happens next?

Energy is a major political issue in central and eastern Europe, where gas supplies from Russia play an essential role in power generation and home heating. Natural gas prices have set new records this winter in Europe, and a conflict in Ukraine could bring more pain to consumers.

On Tuesday, the benchmark price of natural gas for delivery in Europe next month leaped to about €79 (\$89.54) per megawatt hour, up from €71.50 (\$81.04) at Monday's close, according to data from Independent Commodity Intelligence Services.

Prices have dropped from record highs hit just before Christmas. Still, they remain significantly above where they stood one year ago, when gas traded at €16.30 (\$18.47) per megawatt hour.

Analysts said the fight over Nord Stream 2 shouldn't dramatically change the price outlook for this winter. The pipeline hadn't been expected to come online until the second half of the year, noted Tom Marzec-Manser, head of gas analytics at ICIS.

Still, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, warned after Germany's announcement that prices in Europe would skyrocket.

"Welcome to the brave new world where Europeans are very soon going to pay €2,000 for 1,000 cubic meters of natural gas," he tweeted.

Marzec-Manser said that would be equivalent to approximately €215 (\$243.75) per megawatt hour, roughly 20% above the record high reached in December.

Europe is in better shape than it was a few months ago after ramping up imports of liquefied natural gas, or LNG, in January and early February, according to Henning Gloystein, director of energy, climate and resources at Eurasia Group. Weather has also been relatively mild.

Yet a lot rides on what happens next.

LNG from the United States and Qatar will help the bloc withstand any disruptions to gas flows though Ukraine, which account for about 10% of total supply to the European Union, should pipelines be damaged in fighting.

But if Moscow, which has already reduced its gas exports to Europe, decides to choke them off further in response to Western sanctions, it could dramatically escalate the situation.

"If Russia stops sending any gas to Europe, there isn't enough LNG to cope with that," Gloystein said.

He said Russia is not expected to take such a drastic step since it would also hurt Gazprom, but it remains a possibility given Putin's recent aggression.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Putin address: swipe at US-led world order
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-address-takes-swipe-at-u-s-led-world-order-11645485419?mod=hp_trending_now_article_pos2
GIST	Russian President Vladimir Putin 's combative address Monday from the Kremlin was a nearly hourlong recitation of decades worth of historical grievances and an unmistakable challenge by Moscow to the post-Cold War international order dominated by the West.

The speech, ostensibly aimed at recognizing the independence of two breakaway statelets that Russia carved from Ukraine in 2014, outlined Mr. Putin's view that Ukraine was a historical accident that the U.S. has turned into a launchpad to attack Russia.

"The United States and NATO have begun the shameless development of the territory of Ukraine as a theater of military operations," Mr. Putin said, seated at a desk flanked by Russian flags.

Mr. Putin's speech echoed defiant remarks he delivered in Munich in 2007 that helped set the trajectory of his combative relations with Washington. Then, he sharply criticized what he called a U.S. monopoly on foreign relations and American use of force in places such as Iraq.

While on Monday he [left his precise intentions toward Ukraine unclear](#), he expounded the Russian view that Ukraine's borders were drawn arbitrarily by the Soviet Union's founder, Vladimir Lenin, and only exist now because of the U.S.S.R.'s hurried breakup in 1991.

Mr. Putin said those borders ignored deep civilizational ties between Russia and Ukraine and questioned the legitimacy of an independent Ukrainian state, saying, "Ukraine for us is not just a neighboring country, it is an integral part of our own history, culture and spiritual space." Mr. Putin addressed his speech not only to Russia, but also to "our compatriots in Ukraine."

Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, a move backed in a referendum by an overwhelming majority of the population and quickly recognized by Russia. Ukrainians have increasingly sought to forge a separate identity from Russia, particularly since Moscow invaded and seized portions of the country in 2014.

A senior Biden administration official said Mr. Putin's speech was intended to attack Ukrainian sovereignty and independence. "He made a number of false claims about Ukraine's intention that seems designed to excuse possible military action," the official said. "This was a speech to the Russian people to justify a war."

Mr. Putin has long railed against what he calls U.S.-led efforts to turn Ukraine into a Western-facing democracy, claiming Russia's ties with Ukraine gave it a unique right to intervene there. Now, he has bracketed Ukraine on three sides with more than 150,000 troops.

"Right now I have my doubts that the European political elite and diplomats understand the full complex of problems they will run into" as Mr. Putin works to advance his agenda, said Aleksei Chesnakov, a former adviser to the Kremlin on foreign policy. "He wants more decisive steps militarily, politically and economically. He is ready."

The Russian president's address veered from assessments of Ukrainian economic policies to a recounting of debates between Lenin and Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin to a theoretical estimate of flight times for ballistic missiles from an eastern Ukrainian city to Moscow. The U.S. has said it has no plans to place missiles in Ukraine.

The speech echoed years of complaints by Mr. Putin that the West was trying to tear Ukraine away from Russia. He was scarred by the 2004 Orange Revolution, when mass protests overturned a tainted election and vaulted a pro-Western candidate to the presidency over one of Mr. Putin's protégés.

Another revolution in 2014 ousted a pro-Russian president and led the Kremlin to seize Crimea and try to foment pro-Russian protests across the south and east of Ukraine, a territory that Mr. Putin then referred to by its Czarist-era name, Novorossiia. Those protests were largely put down by local law enforcement or pro-Ukrainian activists, with only the protests in Donetsk and Luhansk escalating into warfare.

One protest in Odessa ended with the deaths of dozens of pro-Russian protesters who took shelter in a building that then caught fire in a day of pitched street battles. Mr. Putin promised vengeance in his address.

“The criminals who committed this atrocity have not been punished, no one is looking for them, but we know their names and will do everything to punish them: find them and bring them to justice,” he said.

Mr. Putin said “external forces” had been promoting governments in Kyiv that have been striving to dissolve the traditional bonds between Russia and Ukraine and “distort the consciousness and historical memory of millions of people, entire generations living in Ukraine.”

As a result, he said, “Not surprisingly, Ukrainian society is faced with the rise of extreme nationalism, which quickly took the form of aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism.”

Mr. Putin and his propaganda channels have long tarred pro-Western forces in Ukraine as nationalists and sought to portray radical groups, which are marginal, as a guiding force behind government policy. Successive Ukrainian governments have pursued closer security, political and trade ties with the West, policies Mr. Putin has decried as anti-Russian.

The Russian president for years has appealed to shared cultural ties, from language to religion, in calling Ukraine and Russia “brother nations.” But Moscow’s military interventions in Ukraine since 2014, which have caused some 14,000 deaths, have turned Ukrainians against their former ruler.

Since 2014, Ukrainian authorities have sought to rid their country of the symbols of the Soviet past, felling statues of Lenin and changing the names of roads and cities across the country. They have won recognition for their own Orthodox church, independent of Moscow. Polls show more than half the country would now vote for membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, rather than accession to any Russia-led blocs.

Those changes, Mr. Putin suggested in his address, were forced on the country by nationalists backed by the U.S.

“Ukraine has become a colony of puppets,” he said. “Ukrainians squandered not only everything we gave them during the U.S.S.R., but even everything they inherited from the Russian empire.”

In one portion of his speech, he called Soviet ideals “odious” but elsewhere made a veiled threat against Ukrainians who had pulled down statues of Lenin. “Do you want decommunization? Well, we’re fine with that. But there is no need, as they say, to stop halfway. We are ready to show you what real decommunization means for Ukraine.”

Mr. Putin wants to return to a world of empires with spheres of influence, which makes Ukraine the key challenge, said Volodymyr Yermolenko, a Ukrainian philosopher and editor.

“Putin is quite logical in a way,” he said. “But this logic is inhuman. It says human lives and nation states don’t matter.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Vaccine protection against omicron weaker
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/interactive/2022/vaccine-omicron-effectiveness/?itid=hp_pandemic
GIST	While coronavirus shots still provided protection during the omicron wave, the shield of coverage they offered was weaker than during other surges, according to new data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The change resulted in much higher rates of infection, hospitalization and death for fully vaccinated adults and even for people who had received boosters.

The decline in protection continued a pattern driven by coronavirus vaccines' [reduced effectiveness over time](#), combined with the increasing contagiousness of the delta and omicron waves.

Before delta struck the United States in July, there were five to 10 [cases of covid-19](#) for every 100,000 fully vaccinated adults each week, while the rate for unvaccinated people was 50 to 90 cases.

In the delta wave, unvaccinated people were five times as likely to get infected as vaccinated people. With omicron, that difference dropped to less than three times as likely.

Omicron caused [unprecedented hospitalization along with infections](#).

The new data shows that vaccines provided greater [protection against hospitalization](#) than for infection during the omicron wave, even as that protection waned. Before omicron, unvaccinated people were 15 times as likely to be hospitalized as were fully vaccinated people. With the latest coronavirus variant, the difference in rates dropped to about seven times as much.

Among the most vulnerable people — those 65 or older — the unvaccinated were about four times as likely to be hospitalized as fully vaccinated people who also had boosters. Before omicron, the difference was more than nine times.

Younger unvaccinated people were about five times as likely to be hospitalized as their peers with boosters.

Vaccines provided their greatest protection against death. [CDC's data on deaths](#) went through only December, before the peak of more than [2,600 deaths per day](#) in January. At the end of December, unvaccinated people were 10 times as likely to die as the vaccinated who had received the initial series of two Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna shots, or a single dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. That difference was about one-third smaller than it had been before omicron.

Before omicron, unvaccinated people were 50 to 60 times as [likely to die](#) as people who had received the initial series of vaccines and a booster. That difference dropped in late December to 27 times as high.

The breakthrough estimates are drawn from a sample of health departments that track vaccine status for infected people.

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HEADLINE	02/22 'Freedom convoy' spinoffs on social media
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2022/02/22/dc-freedom-convoy-protest-plans/
GIST	<p>Local and federal agencies are preparing for possible traffic disruptions in the D.C. region related to plans inspired by the self-styled "Freedom Convoy" that occupied downtown Ottawa for more than three weeks protesting vaccine mandates.</p> <p>Multiple convoy spinoffs have popped up on social media apps such as Facebook and Telegram, encouraging Americans to mobilize and head to the nation's capital to protest vaccine mandates. There are many evolving plans, including one man saying he is leading a protest to the Beltway as soon as Wednesday; a permit filed to rally near the Washington Monument on March 1; and other organizers claiming to kick off a trip from California on Wednesday before arriving to their final destination in the D.C. area on March 5.</p> <p>But extremist researchers say it is still unclear when or if these protests will happen or whether it is social media posturing.</p> <p>With competing convoy organizers, routes and dates, much is unknown about the details. If plans do materialize, it's not clear where D.C.-area demonstrations would take place, how many people would be coming, what exactly they would do or how long they would stay.</p>

Cynthia Miller-Idriss, who [runs the Polarization and Extremism Research and Innovation Lab at American University](#), said security officials have to be careful to “thread that needle” between playing down alarmist messaging and preparing for all possibilities.

Security and law enforcement officials [were caught flat-footed](#) on Jan. 6, 2021, failing to take online plotting and threats seriously ahead of the violent mob storming the Capitol. In that aftermath, they have opted to overprepare for other right-wing threats — such as the “[Justice for J6](#)” rally, a protest in September in support of those charged in the violent Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol — which led to the mobilization of multiple law enforcement agencies and the reinstallation of the U.S. Capitol temporary perimeter fencing for what turned out to be a small gathering.

“You can’t just write it off as a disruption that might come. These are public safety issues and so they do have to respond. ... But I am frustrated that there aren’t earlier options being invested in,” Miller-Idriss said, recommending investments in digital and media literacy to prevent people from being dragged down rabbit holes of conspiracy theories. “We’re in a Catch-22 at this point.”

Hundreds of D.C. National Guard personnel and 50 large tactical units are authorized to assist with traffic control during First Amendment demonstrations expected in the city in the coming days, according to a news release late Tuesday night. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved a Feb. 16 request from the city’s Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency that allows for the help of about 400 D.C. National Guard personnel, and 50 large tactical units stationed at traffic posts on a 24-hour basis, starting at 1 p.m. Saturday — or as soon as possible — and lasting through March 7.

Austin also approved a Feb. 20 request from Capitol Police that allows up to 300 National Guard personnel from outside the District to assist at U.S. Capitol entry points and traffic posts starting no later than 7 a.m. Saturday.

In a Feb. 18 statement acknowledging plans for “truck convoys” to arrive in the District around the March 1 State of the Union address, the U.S. Capitol Police said the agency and the Secret Service are in “ongoing discussions,” which include the option of reinstalling the temporary inner-perimeter fence.

D.C. police also are preparing for possible demonstrations by deploying its civil disturbance units from Feb. 23 to March 1, spokesman Dustin Sternbeck said on Friday, while noting that the department’s plans may change as the situation develops.

“January 6th has made this situation in the United States more challenging and scarier,” Victor Asal, the director of the Center for Policy Research at the University at Albany, State University of New York, said of predicting far-right threats. “We still don’t know how many trucks and truckers are actually going to follow through and I don’t think we are going to know that at least for several more days.”

Anti-vaccine [activists from across the country](#) gathered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial last month for a rally against vaccine mandates. Though organizers estimated that 20,000 people would attend the rally, there was a smaller crowd of several thousand and [police reported no arrests](#) or significant incidents.

Still, this movement in America, like [the Ottawa protests](#), appears fueled by far-right extremists and conspiracy theorists. And extremism researchers said it’s increasingly difficult to predict when the keyboard warriors in far-right chat rooms that often include talk of violence will translate their threats into large demonstrations in the real world.

Although these demonstrations are billed as protesting vaccine mandates, researchers said the conversations are much broader, encompassing a range of right-wing culture grievances. They include baseless claims that the 2020 presidential election was stolen from former president Donald Trump, falsehoods about [coronavirus](#) vaccines, pushback related to how students are taught about race and racism, and myths about human trafficking.

Americans also sent millions of dollars, and the largest overall number of contributions, to support the Ottawa trucker convoy, [according to a Washington Post](#) analysis of leaked fundraising data.

Brian Brase of northwest Ohio, who is an organizer of one of the convoys, said the protests in Ottawa inspired him to lead a similar one in the United States. When asked about extremists in his movement he replied, “We have nothing to do with that” and said organizers are taking security measures to ensure a peaceful protest. He did not disclose exactly what the group plans to do if and when they make it to the D.C. region next month.

Still, extremism researchers are concerned about the ways these protests are being promoted in the mainstream and by the far right. High-profile U.S. Republicans expressed support for the Ottawa demonstration, [including Trump](#) and Texas Attorney General [Ken Paxton](#). Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) has said [he hopes truckers](#) would come to the United States, and Fox News host Tucker Carlson is selling \$35 “I ♥ Truckers” T-shirts, in a play on his name.

“Whether the convoy happens, there is still very much a risk,” said Sara Aniano, a Monmouth University graduate student studying the social media rhetoric of far-right conspiracy theories and misinformation. “What’s already happening is this deeper spread of misinformation here. People who might have just been curious about this convoy are now being deliberately led down a path of far-right radicalization.”

The organizer who said he plans to lead a group of truckers to the Beltway on Wednesday afternoon in an anti-vaccine mandate protest appears to have a relatively small following online.

Another organizer has requested to hold a rally on March 1 with “hopefully 1,000-3,000” attendees at the Sylvan Theater, the public theater on the Washington Monument grounds, in “support of convoys in Canada,” according to a permit application submitted to the National Park Service.

And another group aims to make it to this region next month, with plans to kick off a cross-country road trip on Wednesday from California before arriving in Hagerstown, Md., on March 4. The following day, according to the group’s plans, they will arrive in the “DC Beltway area,” but do not plan to go into the city. This group, of which Brase is one of the organizers, has amassed a large following on social media with a Facebook group of about 148,000 members and a Telegram channel of more than 45,000 members.

The plans for a convoy to protest vaccine mandates are just one part of a broader movement that includes a range of right-wing causes — and one that can be mobilized again in the future, extremism researchers said.

“This movement morphs into different things. Right now it’s vaccines and it’s a convoy. It will be something else in the future. It has been something else in the past,” Orr Bueno said. “The convoy of some sort will probably happen in some form, but that also won’t be the end of this movement. Something else will pop up.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Covid spread within hospitals all-time high
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/science/2022/02/covids-spread-within-hospitals-hit-all-time-high-amid-omicron-wave/
GIST	<p>Spread of COVID-19 within US hospitals hit a record high in January, with more than 3,000 hospital-acquired infections each week during the month and a peak of over 4,300, according to an analysis of federal data by Politico.</p> <p>The surge of hospital transmissions mirrored the towering wave of cases in the overall population driven by the ultratransmissible omicron variant. The previous record for hospital-transmission of COVID-19 occurred in January 2020 when federal data caught over 2,000 infections per week within hospitals.</p>

Return to Top	<p>Still the numbers overall are likely to be significant undercounts given that they only capture patients who spend 14 consecutive days in a hospital and become infected during their stay. The data does not account for shorter stays or people who test positive after discharge.</p> <p>Politico noted that the data also does not indicate which hospitals had the highest transmission. And the data doesn't capture how the pandemic virus spread to patients within hospitals, i.e., how much was spread from health care workers to patients, patients to patients, or visitors to patients.</p> <p>A variety of factors could have contributed to in-hospital spread, including limited availability of COVID testing and people spending long periods in crowded waiting rooms as some health care facilities became overwhelmed during the omicron surge. Lack of enforcement of masking in hospitals by patients and visitors may have also been a source of infection.</p> <p>Another possibility is loosened guidance for infected health care workers. In December, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention eased guidance for health care workers who tested positive for COVID-19. In crisis situations, the CDC allowed for infected health care workers to return to work without isolating or testing negative. However, health care workers were still expected to wear high-quality N95-grade masks, which would minimize spread of the virus.</p> <p>Anonymous officials told Politico that the CDC is investigating the cause of the surge in hospital infections. But while there's room for improvement in transmission prevention measures, outside experts noted that the rate of infections within hospitals was very low relative to the rate of infections out in communities. Getting infections down to zero is almost impossible.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/21 Retroactive decertification police officers
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/civil-rights-groups-seek-retroactive-application-of-new-police-decertification-statute/
GIST	<p>A coalition of more than 40 activist and civil rights groups has petitioned the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC), seeking to ensure it vigorously applies new standards that significantly expand circumstances when troubled police officers can lose their badges.</p> <p>The coalition, led by the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington, wants to make sure that the commission understands that new standards outlined in Senate Bill 5051, which took effect July 25, can and should be retroactively applied to significant cases of misconduct that occurred before that date.</p> <p>The measure, passed by the Washington Legislature last year, accomplished a number of goals, including expanding the size of the commission and the scope of its responsibilities. It greatly expanded the grounds for denial, revocation or suspension of an officer's certification.</p> <p>The letter was written in response to concerns “that an internal decision may have been made to limit the application” of the new standards only to conduct that occurred after the July 25 implementation date, the letter said.</p> <p>“The conduct of the 10,000+ law enforcement officers under the CJTC’s authority is relevant to their fitness for duty — yesterday, today and tomorrow,” the group wrote in the Feb. 14 letter addressed to CJTC Director Monica Alexander. “The CJTC cannot fulfill its mission to ‘promote the public trust and confidence in every aspect of the criminal justice system’ while there are persons in the ranks with serious misconduct beyond the reach of the commission.”</p> <p>Authors of the measure, and police accountability experts at the ACLU who worked to ensure its passage, say the measure contains no such limiting language and that its intent was to arm the commission with significantly expanded powers to revoke the certification of rogue or unscrupulous officers “regardless of when these offenses were committed or adjudicated.”</p>

The measure expanded the membership of the commission to include people whose lives have been affected by police violence or misconduct. It also requires an agency conduct background checks on any officer it hires, whether just out of the academy or on a lateral transfer from another agency.

The measure also includes new discretionary language, giving the commission the option to revoke or suspend an officer's certification in circumstances that, before the law's implementation, would not have resulted in sanctions. That includes instances in which an officer's agency found they had used excessive force, cases of racial discrimination and instances in which officer conduct was criminal, regardless of whether there was a conviction in a court of law.

"This is about someone's license and their suitability to be a police officer," said Enoka Herat, the attorney overseeing police practices and immigration at the ACLU of Washington. "When misconduct occurred should not impact that. There are cases where someone's conduct before July 25 where this law should be applied."

Alexander said the commission will discuss the issue at its meeting Wednesday.

She declined to predict the outcome of the discussion or offer her opinion on the letter before that meeting, but acknowledged that there had been "a lot of conversation" about the intent of the new legislation and whether its provisions should be applied retroactively.

She said there are concerns about revisiting older misconduct cases to apply the new, significantly more expansive provisions for decertification. "We have to ask ourselves what is fair and what is the moral thing to do," Alexander said.

The legislation was written by state Sen. Jamie Pedersen, D-Seattle, and Anne Levinson, a former judge and longtime police accountability advocate, who said the measure contains no limiting language that would preclude its application to misconduct that occurred before its implementation. Indeed, she said that was part of its intent.

"It allows the commission to consider in certain circumstances events that occurred before July 25," Levinson said. "Its intent is to significantly strengthen accountability statewide. It was with intentionality the commission has been given this discretion."

The letter outlines several recent examples of officer behavior that occurred before July 25 that could be reviewed by the commission for sanctions, including the case of [Kent Assistant Police Chief Derek Kammerzell, who was disciplined but not fired](#) in 2020 for posting Nazi rank insignia on his office door, joking about the Holocaust and adopting the Nazi title of "obergruppenfuhrer"; and [Pierce County Sheriff Ed Troyer, who has been charged and is pending trial](#) for allegedly filing a false report after calling 911 on a Black newspaper delivery person in January 2021.

However, Levinson and Pedersen, the measure's sponsor, said there are obviously limits to the extent the commission should review past bad behavior: It should be fairly recent or significant, or be part of a pattern that calls into question the officer's suitability to carry a gun and badge.

"We did not intend to make the CJTC into a truth and reconciliation commission and go back through the past 75 years of history to address every instance of police misconduct," Pedersen said. "The key question we want them to ask is whether this individual's continued presence as a law enforcement officer undermines public confidence in the system as a whole."

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HEADLINE	02/21 Seattle PD struggles to hire new officers
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattle-police-department-struggling-to-hire-new-officers-amid-surgin-crime

GIST	<p>SEATTLE - Violent crime reached a 14-year high in Seattle last year as the city's police department deals with a staffing shortage that is straining its ability to protect the community.</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said during his state of the city address this week that there is funding to hire 125 new officers this year and put more resources on the street.</p> <p>"The depleted staffing we see today does not allow us to react to emergencies and crime with the response times our residents deserve," Harrell said Tuesday.</p> <p>"It does not allow us to staff the specialty teams we need for issues like domestic violence or DUI or financial crimes targeting the elderly," he said. "It does not allow us to conduct the thorough investigations we expect to make sustainable change."</p> <p>Twenty officers left the force in January, 171 officers exited last year, and 186 officers separated from the force in 2020 amid the push to defund the police. Only 137 officers have been hired in that time span.</p> <p>Violent crime rose 20% last year, mainly driven by a 24% surge in aggravated assaults and 18% surge in robberies, according to the Seattle Police Department. Homicides fell by 25% and rapes decreased 6%.</p> <p>There were 612 criminal shootings last year, a 40% increase over 2020 and 86% increase over 2019. Property crimes also increased by 9%.</p> <p>Former Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan issued an executive order last year authorizing \$10,000-\$25,000 hiring bonuses for officers, but those funds are no longer available in 2022.</p> <p>Last November, the Seattle City Council voted against a budget amendment that would have eliminated another 101 officers from the force.</p> <p>Interim Police Chief Adrian Diaz said at the time that the department needs more officers, not fewer.</p> <p>"I know we can retain and hire amazing officers – I see it every day – but the continuing message from some that less officers is the right path to public safety makes that nearly impossible," Diaz said.</p> <p>As the police department tries to hire new officers, newly elected City Attorney Ann Davison announced this month that her office will make a charging decision on all incoming cases within five days.</p> <p>"The best way to interrupt crime happening on the streets today is by quickly and efficiently moving on the cases referred to us by the Seattle Police Department," Davison said.</p> <p>Return to Top</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 PETA seeks SPD investigate UW WaNPRC
SOURCE	https://lynnwoodtimes.com/2022/02/22/peta-seattle-220222/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash., February 22, 2022 – PETA, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, called upon Seattle Police Department Chief Adrian Diaz, today February 22, requesting an investigation of University of Washington's (UW) Washington National Primate Research Center (WaNPRC) concerning allegations of destroying videos and photographs of primates used for experimentation, a class C felony under RCW 40.16.010.</p> <p>In December 2021, the King County Superior Court held the primate center liable based on its destruction of these records as part of PETA's lawsuit against UW for its refusal to turn over videos and photographs of monkeys used at the WaNPRC for alleged "experiments."</p>

Senior WaNPRC personnel, Elizabeth Buffalo and Eberhard Fetz and the facility's interim director, Sally Thompson-Iritani, admitted under oath to the center's policy of systemic destruction of these videos and photographs according to PETA.

As a federally funded institution, destroying photographs and video is an infringement of the state's Public Records Act, which mandates disclosure of public records to preserve transparency and accountability by public officials and institutions. The judge in the case stated, "The lack of any policy/system which identified videos/photos which are being destroyed prevents [UW] from complying with the requirements of the [Public Records Act]." It also appears to violate another state law that criminalizes "injury to [a] public record."

"WaNPRC experimenters would rather risk breaking the law than risk allowing the public to see what they do to monkeys in their laboratories," PETA Senior Vice President Kathy Guillermo said. "PETA is calling on the Seattle Police Department to take immediate action and, if warranted, file charges against anyone who destroyed public records."

PETA also filed a complaint today with the Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), alleging that the WaNPRC violated the Record Retention and Access section of the NIH Grants Policy Statement by destroying the records and apparently flouting state law, according to a news release.

PETA is asking the Seattle PD for an investigation, repayment of the millions of taxpayer dollars used to fund these hidden experiments, and the permanent barring of WaNPRC from receiving future federal grant awards.

The Washington National Primate Research Center (WaNPRC) is one of seven remaining flagship primate centers established in the early 1960's and continuously funded by the National Institute of Health (NIH), with satellite facilities located in downtown Seattle and Mesa, Arizona.

The center first began operating in 1961 and includes the following divisions: AIDS-Related Diseases, Global Programs, Neuroscience, NHP Systems Biology, and other related research support cores. Key areas of research at the facility, according to its website, include infectious diseases, neuroscience and brain disorders, and reproduction and endocrinology. The facility housing over 1,500 primates according to National Primate Research Centers.

In 2021 the University of Washington received \$527,499,672 in NIH funding, slightly lower than its 2020 amount of \$533 million, for research and training.

History of Negligence

In 2019, an experimenter at the facility insisted a surgery be proceeded on a monkey that had not been properly fasted the night before, resulting in the monkey entering respiratory arrest and dying.

In that same year, a monkey undergoing a painful procedure was given a diluted opioid analgesic resulting in inadequate pain relief. Through an investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture it was found that the medicine cabinet had been left open and the opioid had appeared stolen.

In 2018 a pigtail macaque strangled to death when he became untangled in a chain attached to his cage.

In 2016 a monkey died while undergoing an MRI but the cause of death could not be determined because the facility failed to maintain appropriate records. In less than a month later, an eight-year-old pigtail macaque died from dehydration when her watering line had not been properly fastened to her cage. The reported found that the animal did not have water for at least 48-72 hours.

In 2015 three monkeys died due to significant health issues as a result of medical documents that were not adequately filled out.

	<p>In three separate incidents in 2013, baby pig-tailed macaques were attacked and sustained extensive traumatic injuries, and either died or were euthanized.</p> <p>In 2011, the USDA fined the UW \$11,000 after a pig-tailed macaque was found, dead in her cage having lost over 25 percent of her body weight – she starved to death.</p> <p>In 2008 the UW was fined \$20,000 for conducting unauthorized surgeries.</p> <p>According to the Office of Animal Welfare at UW, only three incidents of non-compliance were reported to the USDA for 2021 at the Seattle facility – all were in January. Rabbits did not receive the required daily checks, a nonhuman primate was left in a trapping run for at least 12 hours without access to food or water, and two nonhuman primates escaped their cages and were treated for injuries.</p>
Return to Top	<i>The view the letter in its entirety click here.</i>

HEADLINE	02/22 National Guard to DC ahead trucker convoy
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/pentagon-approves-deployment-of-700-national-guard/
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has approved the deployment of 700 unarmed National Guard troops to the nation’s capital as it prepares for trucker convoys that are planning protests against pandemic restrictions beginning next week.</p> <p>Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved the request Tuesday from the District of Columbia government and the U.S. Capitol Police, the Pentagon said in a statement Tuesday night.</p> <p>The troops would be used to assist with traffic control during demonstrations expected in the city in the coming days, the Pentagon said. Four hundred Guard members from the District of Columbia Guard will be joined by 300 Guard members from other states, according to the statement.</p> <p>Guard members will not carry firearms or take part in law enforcement or domestic-surveillance activities, the Pentagon said.</p> <p>Modeled after recent trucker protests in Canada, separate truck convoys have been planned through online forums with names like the People’s Convoy and the American Truckers Freedom Fund - all with different starting points, departure dates and routes. Some are scheduled to arrive in time for President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address on March 1, though others may arrive afterward.</p> <p>The convoys follow the recent Canadian truckers’ protest which shut down the busiest U.S. Canadian border crossing and besieged the streets of the capital, Ottawa, for weeks to protest government pandemic restrictions. The multiple blockades were broken up by police last week, with more than 100 arrests.</p> <p>It remains to be seen if any of the U.S. convoys would seek to actively shut down Washington’s streets, the way their Canadian counterparts did in Ottawa. Some convoy organizers have spoken of plans to briefly roll through the city, then focus on shutting down the Beltway, which encircles the capital.</p> <p>A statement from the People’s Convoy specifically says the trucks “will NOT be going into DC proper.” That convoy is planning to embark Wednesday from southern California and arrive in D.C. around March 5.</p> <p>The U.S. convoys seek an immediate lifting of what they say are heavy-handed government pandemic restrictions like mask mandates and vaccine requirements. The American Truckers Freedom Fund website says the group is protesting “the unscientific, unconstitutional overreach of the federal government.”</p> <p>Vaccines have proven highly effective at preventing COVID-19 infections, especially serious illness and death, and high-quality masks offer strong protection against spreading or contracting the disease. Public</p>

sentiment, especially among conservatives, has been shifting against government mandates as the pandemic heads into its third year.

People's Convoy organizer Mike Landis, in a video testimonial on the group's website, said the current COVID vaccine "is not proven yet" but supported individual choice on whether to take it or not. Landis said the convoy was open to all vehicles and said the primary goal was to pressure Biden to lift the national state of emergency.

"We want this government to bring back the Constitution," Landis said. "We do not want to be under a dictatorship communism-style regime, like where we are right now."

A state of emergency in the U.S. was declared by President Donald Trump in March 2020. Last week, Biden announced his intention to extend it beyond the current March 1 expiration date.

The websites organizing the American trucker convoys directly reference the inspiration of the Canadian movement. A statement on the People's Convoy website pays homage to "our brave and courageous neighbors to the north - our Canadian brothers and sisters who led the charge."

Metropolitan Police Department Chief Robert Contee said Friday that his department was closely monitoring the shifting information and would be devoting additional police manhours in a rolling state of heightened alert over the next few weeks. In the meantime, he warned D.C. residents to stay alert for unexpected traffic snarls.

"There will be disruptions to traffic, that kind of thing," Contee said. "I think we need to be very candid with the public about what some of the expectations, based upon what we've seen in Ottawa, that we might see here in the District."

Contee called the Ottawa standoff "an incredible situation - one that we have not seen here in the District of Columbia."

Contee and Mayor Muriel Bowser memorably predicted unrest several days before the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol Building. They warned residents to stay indoors and called for additional resources, but the Capitol Police and National Guard were still caught unprepared when crowds of Trump supporters overran the building, resulting in several deaths and numerous injuries.

Lingering memories of that debacle have fueled a heightened sense of anxiety and speculation over the coming convoys. But Bowser said she wasn't yet warning residents to avoid the Capitol area or the National Mall.

"We're not at a point to give specific instructions to residents just yet. We will," Bowser said.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Spotlight on NATO's limitations
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/russian-aggression-shines-spotlight-natos-limitati/
GIST	<p>Russia's military advance on Ukraine is the biggest foreign policy crisis the Biden administration has faced thus far and has cast a harsh spotlight on NATO's relevance as a pro-democracy European security alliance capable of halting further Russian aggression in the region.</p> <p>It's a test after years of criticism of President Trump's public and confrontational manner in calling out major NATO partners for their unwillingness to meet defense spending targets and share the military burden with Washington.</p> <p>Member spending has inched upward since 2019. Still, analysts say NATO has been too slow to beef up and modernize to help regional democracies deflect Russian President Vladimir Putin's increasing</p>

aggression — let alone counter the prospect of an authoritarian global military alliance between Russia and China.

Mr. Putin, by contrast, has steadily improved once-decimated military forces, giving the Kremlin once again the power to project power beyond Russia's borders.

Analysts say the potential is vast for an alliance of U.S. adversaries to increase their sway over the coming decade in Europe and Asia while intimidating fledgling democracies such as Ukraine, which is not a member of NATO but is bordered by four alliance members: Romania, Hungary, Slovakia and Poland.

Although NATO has expanded to include those four and roughly a dozen other Eastern European countries over the past three decades, regional experts say the size of the alliance's force structure has been shrinking since the end of the Cold War.

"Since the breakup of the former Soviet Union, [NATO] has cut its forces," said longtime national security expert and former Pentagon official Anthony H. Cordesman. "This is true of the United States and each of the European countries.

"You have seen a steady decline in European and U.S. capabilities now for something on the order of nearly 20 years," Mr. Cordesman, a senior analyst with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told C-SPAN on Tuesday.

He made the comments as the Biden administration and NATO were scrambling to respond to the Ukraine crisis. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called Russia's threat to swallow Ukraine "the most dangerous moment in European security for a generation."

Already off the table, though, is any role for U.S. and alliance soldiers to directly confront Russian forces inside Ukraine, something President Biden has consistently rejected.

Mr. Stoltenberg said NATO stands "in solidarity with the Ukrainian people" and will continue to provide equipment to Ukraine's military. He stressed that NATO nations bordering Ukraine can rest assured that the alliance will do whatever it takes to shield them from Russian aggression.

Ukraine is Mr. Putin's immediate target, but the Russian leader has the larger challenge of NATO in his sights. Two of his top demands are that NATO promise never to take in Ukraine as a member and that the Western alliance roll back its troops and weapons from a broad swath of Eastern Europe near Russia's western borders.

Delivering on promises

Questions are swirling around NATO's capability to deliver on those promises. "We have over 100 jets at high alert, and there are more than 120 allied ships at sea, from the high north to the Mediterranean," Mr. Stoltenberg said Tuesday. He said members have deployed thousands of troops to the alliance's eastern flank and placed more on standby.

In early February, Mr. Biden ordered 2,000 U.S.-based troops, including elements of the 82nd Airborne Division, to Poland and Germany and shifted 1,000 other American forces from Germany to Romania. The Pentagon expanded the moves Tuesday. Defense Department officials said 800 troops from a U.S. Army battalion in Italy, likely to be drawn from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, are also being shifted to the Baltics.

Officials added that a battalion of 20 AH-64 helicopters and up to eight U.S. F-35 Strike Fighters in Germany are being shifted to Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, an aviation task force consisting of roughly 12 AH-64 helicopters is moving from Greece to Poland.

The U.S. personnel and equipment movements are the most dramatic Washington has engaged in Europe in recent memory. They also far outstrip any troop and equipment commitments from other NATO members in response to Russia's moves in the region.

Four Danish F-16 fighter jets arrived in Lithuania in late January to bolster NATO's air policing mission there, according to Voice of America. NATO countries have deployed roughly 4,500 troops to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland since Russia's forceful annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

France recently announced plans to send several hundred troops to Romania. Germany, the Netherlands and Spain have said only that they are considering sending troops to NATO's eastern flank.

Other major members of the alliance have focused on arming and supporting the Ukrainians. Britain reportedly is sending a team of 30 elite training forces and supplying some 2,000 anti-tank weapons.

Turkey has said it will sell drones to Ukraine, and both countries are moving ahead with plans to co-manufacture sophisticated drones, according to Defense News.

Still, NATO has repeatedly had to react to Mr. Putin's moves against Ukraine, said retired Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, NATO's supreme allied commander from 2013 to 2016.

"Right now, we are in passive deterrence and Mr. Putin is in active measures," Gen. Breedlove said in an interview Tuesday with Air Force Magazine. "That's why I think we see, now, Russians moving into Ukraine."

Piecemeal

Many regard the NATO response as too piecemeal to deliver the level of deterrence necessary to stare down a Russian military wholly focused on its smaller neighbor. Analysts say NATO's limitations explain why the Biden administration is using sanctions rather than a show of military force to try to roll back Russia's aggressive moves.

Retired four-star Army Gen. Jack Keane said NATO would be dramatically outmatched if Russia threatens other Eastern European nations with anything like the 190,000 troops it has massed on Ukraine's border.

"If [Mr. Putin] massed that on any one of the NATO countries that are on his border — Poland, the Baltics — there's no match for that there," Mr. Keane said in a Fox News appearance Monday. "That would take a massive deployment to provide that kind of a match for Putin's capabilities."

Mr. Keane said the U.S. should have pushed more aggressively for the NATO Response Forces, consisting of roughly 40,000 multinational troops as well as air and naval assets, to deploy to the region. "It should be done," he said. "I'm not suggesting that Putin's going to move on Poland, but we've got to make sure that he understands that we've got the determination and resolve to do something about it if he's thinking about it."

Mustering such resolve may prove more difficult than officials want to acknowledge. Mr. Trump wasn't the first U.S. president to gripe openly about NATO allies' failure to spend enough toward upholding the alliance.

Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama expressed frustration that the U.S. shoulders most of the costs. Both presidents pushed for France, Italy, Germany and other members to meet their defense spending commitments. The efforts, along with Mr. Trump's pressure, yielded mixed results.

An analysis published last week by the Center for Strategic and International Studies said the alliance should have been put on high alert after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. It said the U.S. specifically "failed to lead effectively at the presidential level."

	<p>“It failed to effectively rebuild its forward deployed forces and power projection capabilities,” Mr. Cordesman and Grace Hwang, a research assistant at the think tank, wrote in the assessment. The analysis was particularly critical of Mr. Trump’s aggressive approach on the issue of NATO member spending.</p> <p>Critics said Mr. Trump went too far by threatening to pull the U.S. out of the alliance if other members didn’t increase their spending.</p> <p>“The Trump administration effectively turned U.S. policy toward NATO into a mathematically absurd form of burden-sharing bullying,” Mr. Cordesman and Ms. Hwang wrote. “It pushed America’s European allies to spend more without addressing their many differences, the very different key deficiencies in most member countries’ forces, and their very different shortfalls in modernization and interoperability.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Jobs lost to canceled Keystone pipeline?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/biden-misses-deadline-reporting-how-many-jobs-lost/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration is flouting a law that requires it to produce a report on the number of jobs lost by canceling the Keystone XL pipeline, in addition to describing how its action may have affected energy costs.</p> <p>The roughly \$1 trillion bipartisan infrastructure bill passed by Congress and signed into law by President Biden in November included a provision mandating the Department of Energy to produce a report to Congress detailing the impact to American jobs and energy as a result of Mr. Biden’s decision to end the pipeline.</p> <p>The legislation allowed Energy Department Secretary Jennifer Granholm 90 days to provide the information to Congress. But that Feb. 13 deadline came and went last week with no response from Ms. Granholm, according to several Republican lawmakers who have since pressed for answers.</p> <p>“Significant prospective spending for rural communities and small businesses, as well as tax revenue for local schools and public safety, disappeared with the stroke of a pen,” a group of Republican senators wrote in a letter to Ms. Granholm last week. “Knowing the full impact of the president’s actions is important to the American people.”</p> <p>As of Tuesday, the senators still had not received a response, the office of Sen. Kevin Cramer, a North Dakota Republican, told The Washington Times.</p> <p>In a statement, a spokesperson for the Department of Energy acknowledged the senators’ letter and added that they “continue to make progress on this report as we prepare to deliver the final version to Congress.” They did not address questions regarding a delivery date and why it had not been disclosed on time.</p> <p>The Keystone XL pipeline was slated to stretch from Canada to Nebraska, where it would connect with a pipeline that extends to the refineries on the Gulf Coast. It would have been able to carry hundreds of thousands of barrels of oil per day.</p> <p>The multibillion-dollar project was more than a decade in the making, with numerous legal challenges along the way from environmental groups and American Indian tribes, who fiercely opposed the pipeline because of potential harm to the environment. Proponents argued it was a jobs creator that would drive down energy costs.</p> <p>Keeping a longtime campaign promise, Mr. Biden issued an executive order during the first hours of his presidency that revoked a key permit for construction that had been approved by former President Donald Trump. Mr. Biden’s directive forced the Canadian energy company behind Keystone XL to cancel the project months later, in June 2021.</p>

	<p>Lawmakers have floated a wide range of figures for the number of lost jobs, depending on their support or opposition to Keystone XL.</p> <p>In their letter to Ms. Granholm demanding the required jobs report, the Republican senators noted that the project already employed 1,500 workers. They wrote that it was “projected to provide approximately 11,000 jobs” and that the closure had “erased thousands of real, high-paying jobs and approximately \$800 million in wages.”</p> <p>While a State Department report from 2014 said the pipeline would employ thousands of people, the vast majority of those positions would have been short-term construction jobs.</p> <p>The State Department estimated that during its construction phase, the project would have an average annual employment of 3,900 workers, a number significantly lower than the total 10,000 or more who would likely work on the project because of the short-term nature of the positions.</p> <p>More long-term positions that would last once the pipeline became operational, the State Department added, would total about 50 — 35 permanent employees and 15 temporary contractors.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Fighting back: Ukraine ready for resistance
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/23/ukrainians-ready-for-resistance-the-whole-country-will-be-fighting-back
GIST	<p>If Russian forces try to take new territory in Ukraine, they will face an army that is far smaller and less well equipped than their own but hardened by eight years of fighting.</p> <p>Nearly a decade of war has also left Ukraine with nearly half a million combat-experienced veterans, many now preparing to fight again, officially or unofficially.</p> <p>That combination, and the sheer size of Ukrainian territory, means that even if Russia can outgun Ukrainian forces on a conventional battlefield, any military clash could lead to a protracted and bloody partisan conflict.</p> <p>“The Russian army has better weapons and technical equipment than us, so we may lose battles or campaigns. But they can never win the country if the Ukrainian people are motivated,” said Serhiy Kryvonos, a retired special forces general and former deputy secretary of the national security and defence council.</p> <p>Kryvonos is travelling the country speaking to veterans and organising weapons training to prepare for a popular uprising should Russia invade. “Look at the experience of Afghanistan. It could not be held by the Soviet Union, by the USA, by the United Kingdom,” he said. “They could not beat the Taliban because they were well motivated. Their strongest weapon was their partisans, civilians by day, then at night they took up weapons to shoot or bury a bomb in the road.”</p> <p>In Kyiv, politicians joke that Vladimir Putin did more to create modern Ukraine than their own parties, by giving them a shared enemy and forcing them to unite around a Ukrainian identity. Putin’s years of aggressive policy towards Ukraine also helped hone the military he may now order Russian soldiers to fight.</p> <p>In 2014, when Russia seized Crimea and Russia-backed forces took control of the east, the Ukrainian army was in such degraded form that soldiers weren’t even getting food. In the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, discipline had frayed, weapons systems had gone without maintenance for decades, and hardly any of Ukraine’s soldiers had seen combat.</p>

“The Ukrainian military in 2014 and the Ukrainian military now are two entirely different things, although without [that army] we wouldn’t have a country at all,” said Taras Chmut, a veteran and military analyst with Come Back Alive, an NGO in Kyiv that supports frontline fighters with equipment and training.

“We had a big army, with lots of equipment, but it was old and wasn’t in good condition. Food wasn’t getting to the frontline; people were fighting in jeans,” he said. “Even basic supplies weren’t reaching soldiers, from body armour to first aid kits and communications equipment.”

Today, logistics and training have been improved, and the army has expanded by about 100,000 soldiers, to number about 260,000. Chmut estimates that a total mobilisation including veterans and security forces could put more than a million Ukrainians in arms.

But when it comes to hardware, Ukraine is still extremely vulnerable. It has a long coastline but, after Russia seized Crimea and its ports, almost no naval capacity. It has no missile defence system, and anti-aircraft defence systems are mostly Russian-made, outdated, and impossible for Ukraine to repair as it cannot get parts.

If Russia gains control of the skies over Ukraine, Chmut says he fears civilian slaughter like that seen in parts of Syria, where Russian weapons were used in rebel-held areas.

“We are trying to highlight that we need to work on strengthening our air force,” he said. “It doesn’t matter how many people are ready to fight, if the enemy control the airspace, it could be like in Syria, bombing of towns and cities with [a] great number of deaths among civilians.”

Kryvonos was concerned that civilians could be targeted with punitive measures, even if they are not targeted by weapons. “They don’t even need to open fire. You can cut off Kyiv’s electricity outside the city,” he said. “The larger the city, the easier to create panic and bring it to its knees. If you cut off power it will become a nightmare in a few days, with no water and no heat.”

He said governments had not done enough to warn civilians to prepare supplies of food and water, or even put up signs to bomb shelters. That is particularly worrying because in addition to Russia’s superior force of arms in conventional airspace, it could unleash devastating cyberattacks that would make it harder for Ukrainians to access information as any invasion unfolds.

While the government is not moving fast enough for him and many other Ukrainians, people are making their own plans and preparations for the resistance that Chmut says would follow a Russian attack

“If it comes to an invasion, it will be total war like in 1939. The whole country will be fighting back, there will be a massive resistance. The west should know there will be a large number of refugees too, maybe 5 to 10 million.”

Those determined to fight include Oleg Sentsov, a film director from Crimea who became a national hero after he was detained in his home city in 2014 and convicted of terrorism in a Russian military court. Human rights groups denounced it as a show trial.

He spent five years in Russian jails, including in Siberia where the cold severely damaged his health, before he was released in a prisoner swap in 2019. He says he is ready to fight, even as his latest film, *Rhino*, is feted at festivals.

“I will be in uniform. I have some military training and I know how to act in war,” he said in an interview at a central Kyiv cafe, hours before Putin announced his plans to recognise breakaway regions of Ukraine. “The main thing I learned in this life is not to be afraid. In such a difficult time, I will not be the person running from my country.”

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SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/22/is-russia-invading-ukraine-what-next
GIST	<p>What has Vladimir Putin ordered?</p> <p>The Russian president has recognised the independence of two Russian-controlled territories in east Ukraine. They call themselves the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics. The territories have been armed, financed and politically controlled by Russia since 2014. But until this week, Russia still recognised them as part of Ukraine.</p> <p>Putin has also sent his military on a “peacekeeping mission” to Ukraine, meaning that Russia will formally occupy sovereign Ukrainian territory for a second time following the 2014 annexation of Crimea. But in this case, Russia has not annexed the territories. A document signed by Putin on Monday also allows him to establish military bases or place missiles in the territories.</p> <p>Why is he targeting Ukraine?</p> <p>First, Putin has indicated that he questions Ukraine’s right to statehood, calling modern Ukraine an artificial construct of the Soviet Union. He also sees Russians and Ukrainians as “one people”. Second, he thinks that a western-leaning Ukraine is dangerous for Russia. He has called the possibility of Nato membership for Ukraine a “red line” for the Kremlin. Third, he wants to show that popular revolutions such as the one that took place in Kyiv in 2014 do not succeed in the long run. That helps to prop up his own rule in Russia.</p> <p>What might happen next?</p> <p>The decision marks the end of the Minsk peace deal, a troubled road map out of the conflict that would have left the territories in Ukraine. That deal also contained a ceasefire agreement, which is now also void. More than 14,000 people have died in the fighting that has occurred since 2014.</p> <p>Russia’s military is likely to make a formal entrance into the territories soon. Its troops and military vehicles have secretly taken part in the fighting since 2014, but this deployment will probably be much larger. Moscow will now threaten Ukraine with a broader war if it continues to fight against the “separatists”, telling Kyiv that Russia is now obliged by treaty to defend them from attack.</p> <p>Russia could also justify a further invasion of Ukraine by recognising the territorial claims of the two separatist governments. They include the large city of Mariupol, which is on the other side of the frontlines. If Russia recognises their expanded borders, it may order its troops to begin an offensive against the Ukrainian army.</p> <p>That could be a prelude to a broader conflict. Russia has gathered up to 190,000 troops along the Ukrainian border and is positioned to launch an attack that could threaten the capital, Kyiv, and sweep across much of the country. An offensive of that size has not been seen in Europe since the second world war.</p> <p>What will the west do?</p> <p>Western countries have condemned the threat and are likely to impose sanctions on Moscow this week. But the severity of the punishment will be up for debate. And they have made clear that they will not send combat troops to Ukraine.</p> <p>The US had promised the “mother of all sanctions”, probably targeting Russia’s banking and financial sectors, if Russia invaded Ukraine. But that imagined a blitzkrieg-style ground campaign that could take big cities like Kyiv and Kharkiv. The recognition of the territories and occupation by Russian forces is also an act of aggression but it is not the nightmare scenario.</p> <p>As diplomats met in Brussels on Tuesday, it remained unclear whether Putin’s order to send troops into Ukraine would be the trigger for the massive sanctions the EU has been threatening for weeks.</p> <p>How do gas supplies affect the crisis?</p> <p>On Tuesday, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, stopped the certification process for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline in response to Russia’s recognition of the two self-proclaimed republics.</p>

	<p>First announced in 2015, the \$11bn (£8.3bn) pipeline owned by Russia's state-backed energy giant Gazprom has been built to carry gas from western Siberia to Lubmin in Germany's north-east, doubling the existing capacity of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline and keeping 26m German homes warm at an affordable price.</p> <p>Europe's most divisive energy project, Nord Stream 2 bypasses the traditional gas transit nation of Ukraine by running along the bed of the Baltic Sea. It has faced resistance within the European Union, and from the United States as well as Ukraine, on the grounds that it increases Europe's energy dependence on Russia, denies Ukraine transit fees and makes it more vulnerable to Russian invasion.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Ukraine president calls up reservists
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/23/ukraine-president-calls-up-reservists-as-russia-moves-troops-into-countrys-east
GIST	<p>Ukraine's president has called up the country's reservists and warned that Ukraine could face a battle for its very existence as more countries joined in sanctions against Russia.</p> <p>Volodymyr Zelenskiy ruled out a general mobilisation in an evening address to the nation. But the decision to bring reservists back into active duty was a further sign that Ukraine was bracing for a possible military clash with its neighbour. It came after Russia began moving troops into the country's east.</p> <p>On Tuesday, Vladimir Putin said that Russia will support the territorial claims of self-proclaimed republics in Luhansk and Donetsk, dramatically increasing the likelihood of a larger war in the near future. Joe Biden denounced the move as an attempt to carve out "a big chunk" of the country.</p> <p>The US president said he was bringing in tough new sanctions against Russia for "beginning" an invasion of Ukraine but that there was still time to avoid war.</p> <p>"Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries?" Biden said, announcing sanctions on two Russian banks and sweeping measures to stop Russia raising capital in western markets.</p> <p>Early on Wednesday, Russia's US ambassador, Anatoly Antonov, dismissed the sanctions, saying: "I don't remember a single day when our country lived without any restrictions from the western world. We learned how to work in such conditions. And not only survive, but also develop our state."</p> <p>US secretary of state Antony Blinken cancelled a meeting planned for Thursday with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, saying Russia's actions indicated it was not serious about a diplomatic path to resolving the crisis. The White House said a summit between Biden and Putin, proposed by the French president, was "certainly not in the plans at this point".</p> <p>Speaking alongside Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba in Washington, Blinken warned the crisis was the "greatest threat to Europe since world war two". He said: "[Vladimir Putin's] plan all along has been to invade Ukraine, to control Ukraine and its people, to destroy Ukraine's democracy, which offers a stark contrast to the autocracy that he leads."</p> <p>The warnings came as Australia, Canada and Japan joined the US, UK and European Union in announcing sanctions against Russia and after Germany halted the approval process for the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline.</p> <p>After Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, announced on Tuesday that three billionaire allies of the Russian president and five Russian banks would face punitive measures, his foreign secretary, Liz Truss has written in the Times that the UK is also considering sanctions for members of the Russian Duma and Federation Council, and extending Crimea's territorial sanctions to the separatist controlled territories in</p>

the Donbas. “No UK individual or business will be able to deal with these territories until they are returned to Ukraine,” she said.

Truss said the UK was willing to “[turn] up the heat” on a “long list” of people complicit in the actions of the Russian leadership. The UK was willing to introduce other “measures to limit Russia’s ability to trade and prohibit a range of high-tech exports, degrading the development of its military industrial base for years”.

Australian prime minister Scott Morrison said on Wednesday the Russian government was “behaving like thugs and bullies” and there “must be consequences for Russia’s actions”. Eight senior Russian security officials and the oil and gas sectors will be targeted in the first round, he said, and security agencies were on alert for possible counter-actions by Russia such as espionage and cyber-attacks.

Justin Trudeau said Canada was sending hundreds more troops to eastern [Europe](#) to bolster Nato forces and imposing new sanctions. The prime minister said: “Make no mistake this is a further invasion of a sovereign state and it is completely unacceptable.”

Trudeau said trade links with the two Russian-controlled territories in east Ukraine would be severed, the purchase of Russian sovereign debt banned, and Russian MPs and state-backed banks targeted.

Japan targeted Russian government bonds and trade and people linked to the self-proclaimed republics in Luhansk and Donetsk. “We strongly urge Russia to return to diplomatic process in resolving the development,” said prime minister Fumio Kishida.

For weeks Zelenskiy has urged calm, and a search for diplomatic solutions, even as western allies issued increasingly urgent warnings about Russian invasion plans. Now he has told his country it must “increase the readiness of the Ukrainian army for all possible changes in the operational situation”. He added: “We need to promptly replenish the Ukrainian army and other military formations.”

Zelenskiy’s defiant speech came after the US said on Wednesday that the invasion it had forecast for weeks had finally begun. Zelenskiy said that Ukraine is a peaceful country, but its people would not stay quiet in the face of aggression.

“If we remain silent today, we will disappear tomorrow. We have hard work ahead, every day, but we are read for it, with confidence in ourselves, our country and victory,” he said.

Zelenskiy also said he had held a cross party meeting to propose a defence coalition government and announced the launch of an “economic patriotism” programme of tax breaks and other incentives to bolster a country battered by the threat of war.

Ukraine is losing billions of dollars a month as Europe’s worst security crisis in decades has prompted many who are able to flee the capital, Kyiv, moving to other cities or out of the country entirely.

He urged businesses to defy diplomatic warnings to foreign citizens to leave the country, after many embassies moved west to the city of Lviv; US diplomats even sleep in neighbouring Poland and commute to their jobs.

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HEADLINE	02/23 Conditions dictate: invasion or retreat
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/23/harsh-conditions-mean-russian-troops-near-ukraine-will-need-to-be-moved-soon
GIST	Russian forces massing near Ukraine’s borders can only remain in position for a few days before they have to be sent back to nearby bases or risk their capability being significantly degraded, western officials and experts believe.

That means that President [Vladimir Putin](#) will come under increasing pressure to use them in a full invasion of Ukraine – or send them back to staging areas, still in Russia’s south or west, but tens or even hundreds of kilometres back.

Such advance positions, often with poor protection from the cold, can be held only for a short period – and there is some evidence on social media of the poor conditions endured by soldiers near the border.

Postings spotted by [military analyst Rob Lee on Monday](#) showed about [100 soldiers camped out](#) – or rather lying down – at a train station about 20km from Ukraine’s border, without rations and having to buy food for themselves.

Russian troops based in Belarus, in forests near the town of Khoyniki, 50km from the Ukraine border, [were described by one local](#) a few days ago as people who “drink a lot and sell a lot of their diesel fuel”, suggesting a lack of discipline despite the heightened political tensions.

Western intelligence estimates that roughly a third of the overall Russian forces are now believed to be “tactically deployed” in frontline positions “poised for operations”. Their movements have been monitored closely using aerial and other reconnaissance for several weeks, as they edge closer to the border.

On Monday, one senior official said they believed it would only be possible for Russia to maintain them in their forward positions for “a matter of days” – a conclusion that is endorsed by independent experts.

Nick Reynolds, a land warfare analyst with the Rusi thinktank, said: “If the troops are to be used then they will likely be used very soon, while they are as fresh as possible” and concurred with the assessment that commanders would want to move them on in “a few days” if they are to be effective.

Latvia’s defence minister, Artis Pabriks, agreed the next few days were crucial. He argued Putin will test western reaction to his recognition of the separatist territories and the formal deployment of Russian forces there.

“They will have a small period of reconnaissance and thinking what the west is doing and what the west is planning. They will assess our responses. And if these responses will not be strong enough or convincing enough, then the next stage will be more incidents on the de facto Ukrainian border,” he said.

It remains perfectly possible for Russia to reverse the frontline deployment and return troops to the staging areas they occupied in January, in a similar way to what happened last spring, ready to escalate at short notice once they have resupplied. But, either way, military pressures mean the next few days are likely to be significant.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Economic boom can't lift America's spirits
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-this-economic-boom-cant-lift-americas-spirits-11645544670?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>Americans normally are happiest when the economy is growing rapidly. The unusual nature of today’s recovery has upended that pattern.</p> <p>Last year was the best year for job growth on record. Workers are commanding solid wage gains. Booming home and stock-market values have lifted household wealth to records.</p> <p>But the record job growth followed record job losses in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Inflation at 7.5% is eating up those wage gains for many Americans. And the unsettling effects of the pandemic, such as product shortages, are still playing out.</p>

That explains why consumers say they feel as bad as they did in the financial-crisis year of 2009, a recent [Gallup poll](#) showed. For the first time, Americans who say they are “not too happy” outnumber those who say they’re “very happy,” according to a survey from the nonprofit group NORC at the University of Chicago.

Unlike the country’s last big inflation bout in the 1970s and early 1980s, when price pressure built over a decade, this time a cost-of-living runup unfolded in months. It caught many off guard, from President Biden and Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell to the ordinary grocery shopper.

The latest phase of the pandemic has further eroded faith in leaders and institutions, leading to feelings of frustration, aimlessness and helplessness, polling shows, even among some who are doing well in today’s economy.

“I’m lucky because I have zero debt—I don’t have a mortgage, I don’t have a car payment, I don’t owe a penny to the world right now,” said Paul Remick, who is a year into retirement in Kingston, N.Y. Despite that stability, he is among the many who are anxious about the economy’s future.

“You listen to these Fed guys—Powell right now. ‘Oh, we think we’ll get inflation under control this year.’ Fine, but do you really think these food companies are going to lower prices once the supply chain gets settled?” Mr. Remick asked. “Do you think eggs are going to go down? These prices are here to stay.”

The economic gloom could have important political implications. President Biden is counting on strong growth, propelled in part by a \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 stimulus law and a roughly \$1 trillion infrastructure package, to boost his popularity heading into this year’s midterm elections. His approval rating is down sharply—to 41.7% as of last Wednesday versus 52.7% last summer, according to [a poll average by the website FiveThirtyEight](#)—amid surging inflation and recent waves of the pandemic.

Perhaps most troubling for Democrats, confidence in the economy among independents, the voters most likely up for grabs, has fallen in February to its lowest since 2009, according to the University of Michigan index of consumer sentiment.

The public’s worries about inflation could increase the Fed’s inclination to raise interest rates this year, to keep expectations of further price rises from becoming self-fulfilling. Economists say when households anticipate inflation, they are more likely to behave in ways that stoke it, such as demanding raises.

As late as last March, the Fed was projecting inflation would only reach between 2% and 3% for 2021. When prices rose quickly in the summer, Fed officials and the Biden administration [blamed temporary factors](#). But inflation hit 7.5% in January. The Ukraine crisis threatens to make it worse, by raising oil prices.

Prices also are rising faster than wages, which means people see their purchasing power slipping.

Mr. Remick in Kingston made a modest living over three decades as an administrative assistant for the county government before retiring a year ago. The 59-year-old has been plowing money into mutual funds and other investments since the 1980s and gotten a nice return, enough to allow him retire early while also collecting a modest pension.

His outlook has darkened since last summer. First, he had to wait four months for parts to fix his Kawasaki Ninja motorcycle. Then, he watched with bewilderment what was happening in his trips to the grocery store.

“I’m looking at the prices of food and they are skyrocketing,” Mr. Remick said. “Four months ago I could buy a dozen eggs for 88 cents. Now I go there—\$1.60. They’ve almost doubled in four months.”

Mr. Remick also worries that the asset boom he has benefited from is destined to crash as the Fed raises interest rates to curb the price trend. Though stocks have struggled in recent weeks, they are still up sharply over the past year.

Inflation's impact on moods wouldn't surprise anyone who lived through it four decades ago. Americans then routinely cited inflation as the biggest or one of the biggest problems facing the country, in a time when gross domestic product was growing briskly, as it is now.

"GDP is a very abstract idea, whereas people can understand the concept of inflation and increasing prices," said John Sides, a professor of political science at Vanderbilt University.

While today's inflation hasn't hit double digits, as it did in 1974-75 and in 1979-81, with a peak of 14.6%, it is in some other respects more corrosive. It is accompanied—and, in part, caused—by shortages of goods such as computers, cars, and even [soup and cereal](#). A July [Gallup poll](#) found that seven in 10 Americans had been [unable to get a product](#) or had faced delays in getting one.

Nazar Al-Jamie, a 62-year-old Navy veteran in Orange, Calif., owns an electrical contracting company that employs three others. He and his wife, a corporate executive, each earned in the six figures last year, splitting their time between Orange and a vacation home in a mountain town. Yet, asked to assess his outlook on the economy, Mr. Al-Jamie answers with one word: "Bad."

In November he lost two clients—each would have brought him around \$2,100 for the day in profits—because of shortages of electrical panels needed for the projects. When he visits a supply store for things like light fixtures, he says, he often can't find enough.

He fears that high inflation and supply shortages are here to stay. And he worries about noneconomic things as well, such as crime and political polarization.

"Nobody in business likes uncertainty," Mr. Al-Jamie said. "We don't know what's going to happen to the supply chain. We don't know what's going to happen to inflation. We don't know what's going to happen with our sociopolitical stability in the United States."

Before the pandemic, store shelves were typically 95% full, according to Information Resources Inc., a data-analytics firm that tracks supplies at retail. In the week ended Feb. 13, shelves were 89% full.

Shortages are most acute in things people buy frequently, such as food and beverages. Some are available but in fewer brands, forcing people to ditch their preferred ones, said Joan Driggs, an IRI vice president.

When consumers settle on a brand, they want to stick with it, Ms. Driggs said. For example, baby formula is an "emotional purchase" for many parents, she said: "If they don't find the right size, if they don't find the exact match that they bought last time, they get frustrated."

Shortages reflect disruptions wrought by Covid-19, the persistence of which produces what some call pandemic fatigue.

Last March Mr. Biden, echoing the views of medical experts, predicted the pandemic would begin to fade by July 4. Life would gradually return to normal from there and allow the nation to begin to mark its "independence from the virus," he said. Instead, the virus has roared back twice, as the Delta variant and then Omicron.

The [University of Michigan poll](#) shows consumer confidence improved last spring but dived in the summer as inflation picked up and Delta emerged, sending some people back into semi-lockdown. Confidence had barely begun to recover when Omicron knocked it back down.

Adrienne Arthur, a 44-year-old mother of two in Florence, Miss., owns a business designing jewelry. Before the pandemic, she sold at flea markets, shows and other gatherings. Then most of those events shut

down. Nearly two years later, Ms. Arthur says, the coronavirus still leaves her struggling to find events where she can sell her jewelry.

“It will let up and then it will come back with something new,” she said. For now, her family relies largely on her husband’s income as a truck-fleet supervisor.

About three in four adults are “frustrated” and “tired” of the pandemic and believe most people will get Covid-19, according to [a January poll](#) from the Kaiser Family Foundation. More than half of adults, 56%, said they were more worried about the economy now than they had been during prior surges.

A January [poll from Monmouth University](#) found 7 in 10 Americans agreeing with the statement “It’s time we accept that Covid is here to stay and we just need to get on with our lives.”

Pandemic fatigue has blurred the benefits of a U.S. economy that has rebounded faster from 2020’s drop than that of any other advanced nation. The unemployment rate, 4% in January, is approaching the 50-year low reached just before the virus arrived. GDP grew 5.5% last year, the most since 1984, although measured against a Covid-depressed 2020. Output was about 3.1% higher, adjusted for inflation, in the 2021 fourth quarter versus the fourth period in 2019, just before Covid-19 struck.

Workers are quitting jobs in droves, often for work with better pay or flexibility. Economists estimate households have over \$2 trillion more in savings than they would absent the pandemic, owing to factors including government stimulus money and less spending on commuting, vacations, restaurants and such.

More than 2 in 3 Americans described their personal financial situations as excellent or good in a recent Quinnipiac University poll, yet nearly 8 in 10 described the economy as not so good or poor.

The damper on spirits from inflation and Covid appears to be magnified by the partisan lens through which many Americans see issues.

People’s take on the economy is often intertwined with their view of the government, Vanderbilt’s Mr. Sides said. When something bad happens, elected leaders can get blamed even if they were uninvolved. A study involving the 2015 college football national championship game showed that when people’s favorite football team wins, their approval of the president rises, and when it loses, presidential approval falls.

Compounding these tendencies now is weakening trust in government. Voters’ confidence in the government’s economic policies recently fell to the lowest in nearly eight years, according to the University of Michigan poll.

Since the early 2000s, people’s political preferences have tended to influence their view of the economy more than before, Gallup findings show. The gap between Democrats’ and Republicans’ view of the economy widened during the [Donald Trump](#) presidency, University of Michigan data show.

During the first year of the pandemic, Mr. Trump’s last year in office, feelings about the economy fell sharply among both Democrats and Republicans, according to Gallup. After the Democratic Mr. Biden won, Republicans’ views on the economy dived again, while Democrats’ views picked up, Gallup data show.

Still, the slide in confidence crosses party lines. Ms. Arthur, the jewelry designer in Mississippi, is a lifelong Democrat who voted for Mr. Biden, but said she has lost confidence in him because of inflation. She said she considers him out of touch with the troubles that the pandemic and inflation have dealt to ordinary people, and is open to voting Republican in the midterms.

“The economy looks like we’re going to be at a standstill for a while,” Ms. Arthur said.

	<p>The moment reminds William Galston, a political scientist at Brookings Institution, of 1983, when he was issues director in the presidential campaign of Walter Mondale. That January, a Harris Poll showed the future Democratic nominee beating incumbent Ronald Reagan by 9 percentage points.</p> <p>Twenty-two months later, Mr. Reagan won by 18 points. Mr. Galston attributes the reversal largely to the drop in inflation that year, along with rising wages and strong job growth.</p> <p>“We haven’t been in a period of inflation politics for 40 years,” Mr. Galston said. “Inflation is not only an economic phenomenon, it’s also a psychological one in politics, because it is a psychological proxy for things being out of control. And reining in inflation is seen as a sign that leadership, whoever it is, is getting life back under control.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Chicago ends mask mandate in some areas
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/22/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#chicago-will-end-its-mask-mandate-for-many-public-spaces
GIST	<p>Chicago will end its mask and vaccine mandate for some public places such as restaurants starting on Monday after a recent plunge in cases of the Omicron variant, the city’s mayor said on Tuesday. The move aligns with Illinois’s plan to end a statewide indoor mask mandate that same day.</p> <p>The announcement by Mayor Lori Lightfoot does not apply to some spaces — notably health care settings and public transit, where masks will still be required.</p> <p>“It’s important for us to recognize this moment for what it is: a huge step forward in our effort to overcome Covid-19,” Ms. Lightfoot said. “We would not have been in a position even a few weeks ago to be making this kind of announcement today.”</p> <p>Democratic-led states and cities have announced similar moves this month as Omicron cases declined following a devastating wave that began in December. Connecticut, Illinois and Massachusetts will also lift some mask mandates starting Monday. Washington D.C. will end a mask mandate for schools that day.</p> <p>The United States is seeing a daily average of 89,000 cases, a 65 percent decrease over two weeks, while daily average hospitalizations have also declined 43 percent to about 66,000 during that time, according to a New York Times database. Despite the optimistic data trends, the average daily death toll from the virus still exceeds 2,000.</p> <p>Chicago officials said the decision to ease the mandates was made as key metrics — including daily cases, test positivity and hospitalizations — were all in a dramatic reversal from the surge. The city’s number of cases and hospitalizations have been halved over the last two weeks.</p> <p>“This doesn’t mean Covid is gone,” Dr. Allison Arwady, the city’s public health commissioner, said in a statement. “It simply means transmission levels are lower than they have been during surges. I still encourage people to take precautions and definitely get vaccinated to protect yourself and your loved ones.”</p> <p>Sam Toia, the president of the Illinois Restaurant Association, said he welcomed the decision by Ms. Lightfoot to lift the mandates, which were put in place in January. “It’s been a tough January and February for restaurant operators,” he told The Chicago Sun-Times on Tuesday.</p> <p>It was unclear what Ms. Lightfoot’s decision meant for Chicago Public Schools. Debates over pandemic mandates at schools have been among the most acrimonious, as parents opposed to masking have showed up in force to school board meetings.</p> <p>The district and the Chicago Teachers Union did not immediately respond to messages left by a reporter, and the mayor said she expects an announcement from the district “in a couple days.”</p>

	<p>For her part, Ms. Lightfoot, who caught Covid-19 during the Omicron surge, said that she herself will continue to wear a mask in public places. “That’s my personal choice,” she said.</p> <p>She said she would be particularly careful in restaurants, now that there is no longer a requirement to show proof of vaccination to enter. “I’ll be wearing a mask,” she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Ireland ends mask mandate in most places
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/22/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#ireland-ends-mask-mandates-and-social-distancing-in-schools
GIST	<p>Ireland will end social distancing in schools and lift its mask requirement “in all settings where currently regulated,” officials announced on Tuesday. Public health officials will still recommend the use of masks on public transportation and in health care settings.</p> <p>The new guidance, to go into effect on Monday, came after a recommendation by the National Public Health Emergency Team.</p> <p>“Following a recent moderate increase — particularly amongst young adults — the number of infections detected per day remains high but has stabilized, and may be starting to decrease,” the government said in a statement. “While the burden on our hospitals remains significant, it is relatively stable.”</p> <p>The outlook for Covid in the country is “broadly stable and positive,” Stephen Donnelly, the health minister, said in a statement on Friday. The advice from the public health team “is a key indicator that we are moving forward in terms of our ability to live with Covid-19,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Donnelly credited the Irish people and the country’s vaccine program. The daily average of new cases has dropped 18 percent in the last two weeks, and 80 percent of the country is fully vaccinated, according to a New York Times database.</p> <p>Ireland has gradually loosened its pandemic restrictions this year. Last month, the country cleared the way for its first full public celebration of St. Patrick’s Day in two years when it announced that most Covid restrictions would end that month.</p> <p>That decision allowed bars and restaurants to remain open past 8 p.m., the closing time that had been mandated in the run-up to the holiday season as Omicron cases surged. It also eliminated restrictions on the number of people who can attend events such as weddings, concerts, sporting events and funerals.</p> <p>“Spring is coming, and I don’t know if I have ever looked forward to one as much as this one,” the prime minister, Micheal Martin, said last month. “Humans are social beings, and we Irish are more social than most. As we look forward to this spring, we need to see each other again; we need to see each other smile; we need to sing again.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Target drops mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/22/world/covid-19-tests-cases-vaccine#target-drops-its-mask-mandate-for-employees-and-customers
GIST	<p>Target, the department store chain, will no longer ask its employees and customers to wear masks, regardless of their vaccination status, unless state and local rules specifically require it, according to the retailer’s website.</p> <p>The decision by the retailer, which has 401,000 employees in the United States alone, comes after Walmart and Amazon announced earlier this month that their fully vaccinated employees would no longer have to wear masks unless required by local regulations.</p>

[Several states](#), from [New York](#) to [California](#), have lifted indoor mask mandates, [as the number of reported Omicron cases continues to decline across the country](#).

Target, headquartered in Minneapolis, included the new policy in changes made to its website on Tuesday. [The retailer said that](#) it will continue to provide Covid-19 vaccinations and to distribute free N95 masks through its partnership with CVS, the drugstore chain that operates pharmacies inside many Target stores.

“The health and safety of our guests and team members have been Target’s top priority throughout the pandemic,” [the retailer said](#), adding, “We’ll follow all state and local COVID-19 safety regulations and encourage our team members and guests to consult the latest public health guidance, get vaccinated and make decisions to keep themselves and their families safe.”

[With more than 1,926 stores](#), Target Corporation is [the eighth largest American retailer](#).

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HEADLINE	02/22 Ukraine breakaway regions face new peril
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/world/europe/ukraine-breakaway-regions-conflict-russia.html
GIST	<p>SEVERODONETSK, Ukraine — For days, Viktoria Gudyatskaya listened nervously as the escalating fighting along the front lines in eastern Ukraine approached her home in the town of Novoaidar. The thrumming booms of shelling became so insistent that on Tuesday Ms. Gudyatskaya decided to take her teenage daughter and flee.</p> <p>“We can hear it now through our closed windows,” she said from the platform at the ramshackle station in Severodonetsk, near her hometown, as she and her daughter prepared to board an early morning westbound train to Kyiv.</p> <p>For nearly a decade, violence has defined life for the residents of this pocket of eastern Ukraine, where Russian-backed separatists have carved out two enclaves and waged a steady skirmish with Ukrainian soldiers on the other side of the conflict line. But the decision announced by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia on Monday night to recognize the two separatist enclaves as independent republics — and to order in Russian troops as “peacemakers” — has suddenly brought new and pressing peril to an already fraught region.</p> <p>The European Union’s foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, said Tuesday that Russian troops had entered the separatist region.</p> <p>On Tuesday morning, shelling between the separatists and Ukrainian forces was continuing at different locations along the contact line, as uncertainty about what the Russians would do forced remaining residents to decide whether to stay or go.</p> <p>As dawn broke over the Severodonetsk train station, about a dozen or so people stood on the concrete platform to board the westbound train. It was not a scene of panic, yet, but one of weary resignation. Mothers had stuffed clothes into plastic trash bags or pulled dirt-stained roller bags. They said they were leaving to escape the violence that might be coming.</p> <p>For Ms. Gudyatskaya, who had already been planning to leave, the angry speech by Mr. Putin accelerated her timetable. She didn’t want to wait to find out how much new fury the Russian president might bring.</p> <p>“It felt like he took a decisive step,” said Ms. Gudyatskaya, as she stood with her daughter, Svetlana, 14, who plans to live with a brother in Kyiv “until the situation clears up.”</p> <p>President Volodymyr Zelensky delivered a televised speech at 2 a.m. to urge calm, saying that the country would “keep a cool head” in the crisis. But he also said that Ukraine would not yield territory.</p>

“We are on our own land,” he said. “We are not afraid of anything or anyone. We owe nothing to anyone and will not give anything to anyone.”

Hours later, Ukraine’s defense minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, warned of “difficult challenges ahead” in an address to military officials on Tuesday morning. “There will be losses,” he said. “We will have to endure pain, overcome fear and despair. But we will definitely win.”

From Moscow, Mr. Putin had asserted in his speech that Ukraine had been “created by Russia” and should be part of it today, suggesting a claim to the entire country. But he was ambiguous about a key question on whether his order to deploy forces into the separatist areas would presage a wider attack on Ukraine. The two enclaves, the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic and Luhansk People’s Republic, claim about three times as much territory as they currently control.

If Russia backs those claims, which extend deep into Ukrainian territory, including to the chipped concrete-tile train platform the families were departing from on Tuesday, the Ukrainian government will be forced to acquiesce or face a possible war with Russia.

The territory claimed by the two entities outside the area they now control is home to about 2.5 million people. A flow of internally displaced people to the west is another possibility, though there was no immediate sign of a large-scale movement on Tuesday morning.

But the intensifying violence is taking a heavy toll. On Monday, only hours before Mr. Putin spoke from Moscow, a dozen mortars exploded in the village of Vrubivka, as terrified residents cowered in basements, capturing their horror on video.

“It’s the fourth or fifth incoming,” said Iryna Yarmolenko, 53, as explosions rang out above. “Oh, dear mother, what should I do? It’s coming in. A lot is coming in.”

With a high-pitched whistle, an explosion and the sound of breaking glass, a mortar then hit near her building. Ms. Yarmolenko, who was not harmed, shared the recording with a Times reporter.

Outside, the poplar trees lining the nearby street were decimated, a tableau of sheared branches, craters and broken glass.

“What is there to describe? Shootings, explosions, the plaster fell off the ceiling, the smell of gunpowder,” said Kristina Makarenko, 24, who had also waited in a basement with her two sons, Timur, 7 and Anton, 2. “How should I know why this is happening. They have cockroaches in their heads. They are idiots on both sides, here and there.”

In the dank space, with a dirt floor, illuminated by a bare bulb, the boys played video games on their phones. “The ceiling fell in and we ran to the basement,” Timur said of how his day had begun on Monday. “We ran and ran.”

The situation was no better on Tuesday. Shelling was fierce at the frontline town of Shchastya, where a coal-fueled electrical power plant was hit and caught fire, sending up clouds of smoke. The plant’s owner, DTEK, said employees were evacuated to a bomb shelter.

Without power, running water or heat, residents fetched plastic buckets of water from a well on the edge of town.

“Who could say this isn’t scary?” said Valentina Tsaruk, 55 a retiree, toting a pail of water from the well. “Look at all these negotiations with the Europeans. It came to nothing. I think they just abandoned us. That’s what I think.”

She said she didn’t want to live in the Luhansk People’s Republic, but said the explosions and gunfire ringing out every minute or so on the edge of town was a sign she might be doing so soon.

	<p>“You live not knowing what will happen tomorrow, or 10 minutes from now,” she said.</p> <p>For Ms. Gudyatskaya, standing at the train platform on Tuesday morning, there was no longer any question where she should would run with her daughter — away, to the west. She directly blamed Mr. Putin for her predicament. “If they had another leader, they wouldn’t do this,” she said of the Russians. “The Russian people are fine.”</p> <p>Svetlana, her daughter, who toted a backpack with rainbow-hued straps and said she wanted to become either a car mechanic or a nurse, said she wasn’t as worried as her mother.</p> <p>“Everything is fine,” she said as she boarded the train. “Our guys will win. We will defeat Russia and Russia will fall apart.”</p> <p>Viktoria shook her head. “Faith is always good, Sveta,” she said. “But I am worried.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Russia rationale for Ukraine invasion
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/world/europe/putin-invading-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — Slumped in a chair, red tie askew, his staccato delivery emphasizing every grievance, President Vladimir V. Putin delivered a speech on Monday that sounded like a call to war.</p> <p>It was also the culmination of a propaganda barrage orchestrated by Russian state media in recent days — a stark demonstration of how the Kremlin can use its dominance of the airwaves to lay the groundwork for a political decision that could cause widespread pain.</p> <p>By Tuesday afternoon, Russia’s stock market had fallen again, leaving it some 20 percent down in less than a week, as businesses braced for damaging new Western sanctions. And the potential, far more tragic, costs if Mr. Putin were to go ahead with an invasion of Ukraine still appeared incalculable.</p> <p>But to the millions of Russians watching television, the narrative of the last days has been completely different: Booms and flashes of artillery fire. Blurred-out footage of human remains. Women and children, crying and fleeing. A separatist appeal to the president. An emergency meeting of Mr. Putin’s Security Council. A dramatic address to the nation.</p> <p>And what happens next is a mystery.</p> <p>For months, as Washington warned of a looming Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia’s powerful propaganda machine dismissed and parodied talk of war.</p> <p>Then, last weekend, everything changed. From the occupied territory of Ukraine to the halls of the Kremlin, the rationale for a possible invasion was put into place, piece by piece, and presented to the Russian public in an unrelenting push on state television.</p> <p>By Tuesday morning, the breakfast news on state-run Channel 1 was announcing a “historic moment.”</p> <p>“Eight years of fear have ended,” the announcer declared, a reference to the residents of separatist-occupied eastern Ukraine who, in the Kremlin’s unfounded claims, are being subjected to “genocide” by Ukrainian forces.</p> <p>“We absolutely must help those people,” said Margarita Kurdyukova, a 60-year-old pensioner in Moscow, explaining why she supported Mr. Putin’s decision. “Thank you to our government for at least getting the children and women out.”</p>

Still, it is too soon to tell how most Russians would react to Mr. Putin's moves; so far there is none of the widespread jubilation that accompanied his annexation of Crimea in 2014. On Tuesday, as Russian state media claimed that Ukraine was firing at the Russian-backed separatist regions whose independence Mr. Putin recognized on Monday, it remained unclear how far the Kremlin would go in escalating the conflict.

"Hundreds and soon, tens of thousands of Ukrainians and Russian citizens may die because of Putin," Aleksei A. Navalny, the [imprisoned opposition leader](#), posted on social media. "Sure, he won't let Ukraine develop and will drag it into a swamp, but Russia will pay the same price."

Lawmakers in the lower house of Parliament, the State Duma, hinted on Tuesday that the Kremlin's campaign against the pro-Western government of President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine would not end with Mr. Putin's recognition of the separatist territories in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region.

One nationalist deputy, Andrei Lugovoi, said he hoped that the recognition marked "the beginning of the return of all Ukraine to its historical bosom." Another, Sergei Mironov, ripped into Mr. Zelensky as a "coward, liar and scoundrel."

The angry, righteous tone was a continuation of the flurry of weekend news reports that aimed to paint an American-backed Ukraine as the aggressor — even though it insists it has no plans to mount an offensive against the separatist-held territories. State media seized upon Western warnings of a possible Russian invasion to paint the United States and its allies as warmongers.

On the marquee weekly news show on Russian state television, the host, Dmitri Kiselyov, on Sunday reeled off the international leaders he insisted could profit from war: Prime Minister Boris Johnson of Britain, President Emmanuel Macron of France and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey.

"Everything is very serious," Mr. Kiselyov warned. "Ukraine is literally being dragged into war with Russia."

Later Sunday night, on a weekly show called "Moscow. Kremlin. Putin," the president's spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, reinforced the notion that while war may be coming, it would not be Russia's choice.

"Let me remind you that Russia throughout all its history never attacked anyone," Mr. Peskov said.

On Monday, Russian media broadcast separatist claims of an escalating assault by Ukrainian forces and broadcast an array of unsubstantiated claims — that Ukraine was shelling communications, bridges, a water filtration station and other infrastructure targets. Russian state television reported from the separatist-held city of Donetsk that Ukraine had sent saboteurs behind separatist lines.

On a YouTube channel run by another state television host, Vladimir Solovyov, a reporter on the ground in the separatist territory described the death of a local resident from Ukrainian shelling.

"He was torn to pieces," he said. "There's a genocide going on, people are being killed."

Ukrainian officials insisted their military was not preparing an assault against Donetsk, and said the separatists were shelling their own territory.

Oleksiy Danilov, a senior Ukrainian security official, warned on Monday that Russia was waging a furious disinformation war.

"A great powerful information provocation is being waged against our state," Mr. Danilov said. "But it is necessary to trust only official information."

But any Ukrainian protestations were ignored in Russia. The Russian military said it had destroyed two infantry fighting vehicles of the Ukrainian Armed Forces that had crossed into Russian territory in order to try to evacuate Ukrainian saboteurs. As a result, the Russian military said, five people were killed on the

Ukrainian side — the first time during the crisis that the Russian military has claimed involvement in a deadly, direct clash with Ukrainian forces. Ukraine denied such an incursion had ever happened.

Footage of women and children fleeing the separatist territories tugged at heartstrings. On state television Monday, a reporter described government psychologists mobilizing to support the traumatized refugees who had left husbands and fathers behind.

“I would like to say hello to my Dad,” a young boy was shown saying.

Soon, state television showed video of the Russian-backed leaders of the separatist territories making appeals directly to Mr. Putin to recognize their independence, neatly leading into a special meeting of the Kremlin’s Security Council later that day.

The extraordinary, televised spectacle appeared designed to legitimize Mr. Putin’s fateful decision, casting his decision-making as deliberative and determined — a seeming rebuttal to critics [who saw the president as more isolated than ever during the pandemic](#).

On Monday afternoon, Mr. Putin gathered his senior-most officials in the Kremlin’s cavernous Yekaterininsky Hall, presiding over the unscheduled, televised meeting of his Security Council. Because of Covid, he was seated at his own white table with gold trim, while the officials sat in chairs, arrayed in front of him.

“I would like to underline that I did not discuss anything in advance with any of you,” Mr. Putin said in the middle of the meeting, building the suspense as in a reality show. “What’s happening now is happening on a blank page because I wanted to learn your view without any advance preparation.”

Some officials appeared visibly nervous, while others made thinly veiled calls for a large-scale military offensive against Ukraine.

Mr. Putin repeatedly interrupted his foreign intelligence chief, Sergei Naryshkin, as he seemed to equivocate on whether or not to recognize the independence of the Russian-backed separatist republics in Ukraine’s east, prompting Mr. Naryshkin to stutter and then say he was in favor of annexing the territories.

“That’s not what we’re talking about,” Mr. Putin shot back.

To some Russians, the spectacle of the televised meeting underscored that they had no way of influencing decisions being made in the Kremlin.

“I understand that practically nothing depends on you in this situation,” said Dasha Kryshnikova, a 19-year-old architecture student, in central Moscow. “It’s very strange that a group of people is making a decision on behalf of the whole country.”

Until recently, it appeared that many Russians had tuned out talk of an impending war. Pollsters say that while the possibility of war is one of Russians’ greatest fears, no antiwar movement has emerged in recent weeks both because many simply can’t imagine it — or see how they can influence any decisions.

Russians “feel they can’t influence the process at all,” said Aleksandra Arkhipova, a Moscow social anthropologist, who found that there had been relatively little discussion of a possible war with Ukraine online before the propaganda barrage of recent days. “So they try to avoid it.”

On Sunday, a handful of activists unfurled antiwar posters in central Moscow’s Pushkin Square and were promptly arrested. One of the protesters, Lev Ponomarev, a Soviet-era human-rights activist, insisted that while for the moment many still could not imagine a war, most Russians would oppose it if it actually happened.

	“There will be no support for this war,” Mr. Ponomarev said in an interview on Monday. “It will be the collapse of this regime.”
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HEADLINE	02/23 New Zealand protest digs in, turns ugly
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/australia/new-zealand-protest-vaccine.html
GIST	<p>WELLINGTON, New Zealand — The antigovernment protests that jolted Canada have been quashed. But 9,000 miles away, in the capital of another Western democracy largely unaccustomed to violent tears in the social fabric, an occupation on the grounds of Parliament has entrenched itself and turned increasingly ominous.</p> <p>Hundreds of demonstrators opposed to New Zealand’s Covid-19 vaccine mandate are in their third week of encampment in Wellington, erecting tents, illegally parking vehicles and establishing communal kitchens and toilets in a deliberate echo of the Canadian siege.</p> <p>Initially, the New Zealand occupation had a carnival atmosphere, with a popcorn stand and a doughnut truck and a number of children brought in by their parents. New Zealanders joked that it was the country’s only Omicron-era music festival: Officials blared Barry Manilow and James Blunt to try to drive out the protesters, who responded with some Twisted Sister of their own.</p> <p>In recent days, however, after the police moved to evict some protesters, the demonstration has grown more violent. On Monday, protesters threw feces at the police. On Tuesday, a driver tried to ram a car into a large group of officers, and three other members of the force required medical attention after protesters sprayed them with what a police statement called a “stinging substance.”</p> <p>Many demonstrators describe Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, a global symbol of the political left, as a dictator. Some have threatened journalists and politicians with execution. Others have shouted at students wearing masks on their way to school. Many espouse support for conspiracy theories like those of QAnon.</p> <p>While the protesters represent a tiny minority of New Zealanders, the division is notable in a country that has been lauded for its highly effective response to Covid-19. The escalating words and violence, experts say, demonstrate the dangerous influence that exported American disinformation is having on otherwise stable democracies around the world.</p> <p>“There is a tsunami of bile every day,” said Sanjana Hattotuwa, a researcher at the New Zealand think tank Te Pūnaha Matatini who studies disinformation. It is “a torrent of hate and harm directed towards individuals promoting the vaccine and the prime minister.”</p> <p>Although rifts were already present in New Zealand society, they were “exacerbated by conspiracism which had its genesis outside the country,” Dr. Hattotuwa said. “Everything which you would associate with QAnon in the United States is here.”</p> <p>The protesters were initially united under the banner of opposition to vaccine mandates, which cover workers in certain fields in New Zealand. But they encompass a variety of people, including vaccine skeptics, those aggrieved by mandate-related job losses and far-right conspiracy theorists.</p> <p>The weeklong protests in Canada, which began as a response to vaccine mandates for truck drivers, were broken up on Saturday with tear gas and mass arrests. In New Zealand, by contrast, the police have proceeded more carefully, in part because of early challenges and still-fresh memories of a brutal crackdown on protesters four decades ago.</p> <p>On the protest’s third day, when officers attempted to dislodge some demonstrators, more extreme protesters sidelined the occupation’s organizers and pushed back against the police. After a daylong struggle in which children were placed on the protest’s front line, the police were repelled.</p>

Since then, officers have cautiously patrolled the protest. The police commissioner, Andrew Coster, who was appointed to the role in 2020 after emphasizing the importance of maintaining public support for the force, expressed concern that more confrontational tactics could lead to bloody clashes.

Mr. Coster invoked the so-called Springbok tour of 1981, when thousands of New Zealanders protested against the traveling rugby team from apartheid South Africa. The police violently broke up those protests, including by using batons against protesters on Molesworth Street — a street that anti-mandate protesters now occupy. The episode harmed the police's reputation for decades.

On Sunday, in an interview with TVNZ, Mr. Coster [emphasized](#) his reluctance to repeat that experience. "If we look to the low points of policing in our country, we would look to points like the Springbok tour," he said.

But the police's reluctance to take stronger action seems to have emboldened the protesters.

Many hundreds more people and cars joined. The occupation consumed nearby streets and shut down wider Wellington, with businesses closing after demonstrators harassed staff members for requiring masks and proof of vaccination. In anticipation of a long stay, some protesters drilled holes into the ground to anchor their tents. New protests emerged in other cities.

Some protesters have relished being part of what they see as a global movement. Reuben Michael, a demonstrator who was sitting at the occupation's eastern edge on Wednesday, noted that "this phenomenon has gone around the world."

The New Zealand protesters have successfully forced a conversation about vaccine mandates. On Monday, in what many saw as an effort to encourage the protesters to leave, Ms. Ardern said that vaccine mandates were likely to end after the current Omicron outbreak peaks in the coming months.

But the protesters have largely dismissed the prime minister's comments. One young woman sitting on the steps of a parliamentary war memorial angrily insisted, "She's told too many lies. It's too hard to trust her."

While the police have not moved decisively against the demonstrators, concerns about increasing radicalization, as well as wider public dissatisfaction with the occupation, have prompted officers to take more active steps to contain the occupation.

On Monday, the police escorted forklifts carrying large concrete blocks to establish a border around the protest. During early-morning operations in the days since, the police have begun shrinking that border to try to squeeze protesters into leaving.

The number of protesters appears to have dwindled. But they have left behind a group that shows little interest in de-escalation, prompting concerns that violence is increasingly likely.

When five male protesters sitting on the lawn of an occupied law school were asked what would happen if the police tried to evict them, one answered, "We'll hold our line." A second noted, "There might be bloodshed," prompting a third to insist, "But it'll be peaceful."

The second protester paused, then emphasized, "We'll stay to the end."

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HEADLINE	02/22 UN leader deepens criticism of Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/world/europe/un-russia-antonio-guterres.html
GIST	The leader of the United Nations deepened his criticism of Russia on Tuesday over its actions in Ukraine, not only describing them as a violation of Ukrainian sovereignty but disparaging the Kremlin's descriptions of its troops as peacekeepers. He called the crisis a test of the global organization.

The [remarks](#) by Secretary General António Guterres, who cut short an overseas trip to return to U.N. headquarters in New York because of the Ukraine developments, were among the strongest criticisms the Portuguese statesman has made against a major member country since he became the leader of the organization in 2017.

They went beyond his [reaction on Monday](#), when Mr. Guterres described Russia's recognition of two breakaway Russian-backed enclaves and its decision to send troops into them as inconsistent with the U.N. Charter and a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

"Our world is facing the biggest global peace and security crisis in recent years — certainly in my tenure as secretary general," Mr. Guterres said. "We face a moment that I sincerely hoped would not come."

Referring to Russia's action, he said that "such a unilateral measure conflicts directly with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations" and what is known as the Friendly Nations declaration by the General Assembly, "which the International Court of Justice has repeatedly cited as representing international law."

Russia's action, he said, also represented a "death blow" to the Minsk agreements that were designed to end the armed conflict between Ukraine and the two Russian-backed breakaway regions that has prevailed since 2014.

Mr. Guterres also said he was "concerned about the perversion of the concept of peacekeeping" — a clear reference to the Kremlin's portrayal of the troops ordered into the two regions. He sought to distinguish them from the U.N. peacekeepers on assignment in a dozen missions around the world, invited with the permission of the host country.

"When troops of one country enter the territory of another country without its consent, they are not impartial peacekeepers," he told reporters. "They are not peacekeepers at all."

Answering a few questions, Mr. Guterres also disputed [assertions by President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia](#) that civilians in the two breakaway enclaves were the victims of "genocide" by Ukrainian forces.

"Genocide is a crime that is clearly defined and whose application must be done in line with international law," he said. "I do not think it is the case."

Mr. Guterres, who has said more than once that he believed the Ukraine crisis would not devolve into war, appeared to be far more worried about that prospect on Tuesday.

"Any additional Russian military deployments into Ukraine would only further inflame tensions," he said. "It is high time to return to the path of dialogue and negotiations. We must rally and meet this challenge together for peace, and to save the people of Ukraine and beyond from the scourge of war."

Mr. Guterres said that the "United Nations and the entire international system are being tested" and that "we must pass this test."

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HEADLINE	02/22 EU adopts sanctions; will 'hurt a lot'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/22/world/russia-ukraine-biden-putin?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout_link_back_to_briefing#eu-adopts-first-sanctions-and-they-will-hurt-a-lot-diplomat-says
GIST	BRUSSELS — Europe's top diplomat said on Tuesday that European Union foreign ministers had adopted a first round of sanctions against Russian individuals and entities after President Vladimir V. Putin's recognition of two breakaway regions in Eastern Ukraine .

“This package of sanctions that has been approved by unanimity with the member states will hurt Russia, and it will hurt a lot,” Josep Borrell Fontelles, the high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, told the press after a meeting of the ministers in Paris.

In recent weeks, Europe has been struggling to present a united front against Russia. Europe has important trade ties with Russia and is dependent on Russian gas supplies, both of which could come under pressure if Russia invades Ukraine. Mr. Putin has sought to sow divisions in the E.U., and in the past wielded Russian energy as a geopolitical weapon.

At stake for Europe is whether it can allow Mr. Putin to upend the security structure that has helped buttress peace on the continent over several decades.

Appearing resolute, Mr. Borrell said that the sanctions would target the 351 members of the Russian Parliament, as well as 27 individuals and entities that are “playing a role in undermining or threatening Ukrainian territorial integrity.”

E.U. sanctions would focus on a number of areas related to Russia’s recognition of the so-called [Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics](#), including individual decision makers and other actors threatening Ukraine; defense-sector individuals and companies or government agencies playing a role in the crisis; and banks that are financing operations in the territories.

“We will target the ability of the Russian state and government to access our capital and financial market and services,” Mr. Borrell said.

Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, the E.U.’s executive branch, called the package “solid.”

Ms. von der Leyen said that the first package of sanctions would limit “the Russian government’s ability to raise capital on the E.U.’s financial markets,” although neither she nor Mr. Borrell immediately explained how that would happen.

Both top E.U. officials hailed the German [decision to freeze its Nord Stream 2 pipeline project](#) as a key part of Europe’s response to Russia. “I think the German government is absolutely right,” Ms. von der Leyen, herself a German politician, said.

“Nord Stream 2 has to be assessed in light of the security of energy supply for the whole European Union, because this crisis shows that Europe is still too dependent on Russian gas,” she added.

Mr. Borrell and Ms. von der Leyen said that sanctions would intensify should Russia escalate further.

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HEADLINE	02/22 World watches beginning Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/russian-forces-reportedly-enter-eastern-ukraine-mo/
GIST	<p>Moscow marched down a path toward war Tuesday as Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered troops into Ukraine’s disputed Donbas region and suggested that he is prepared to go much further, while President Biden and America’s NATO allies unleashed a coordinated package of sweeping economic sanctions in a last-ditch bid to halt a full-blown invasion.</p> <p>Mr. Biden delivered a sharp rebuke of Mr. Putin in an afternoon speech at the White House. He announced the first in what could be a series of unprecedented financial punishments targeting the Russian president, his inner circle of oligarchs, Russian banks and other power players and influential companies in Moscow.</p> <p>European nations followed suit with their own round of sanctions. Germany delivered one of the biggest blows by announcing it will halt certification of Moscow’s prized Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline between the two countries.</p>

Mr. Biden said the U.S. will reposition 800 troops along with helicopters and fighter jets from elsewhere in Europe to the Baltic states — which, like Ukraine, are former Soviet republics — to shore up defenses along NATO's eastern border.

However, he again stressed that he is not sending U.S. troops to fight the Russians in Ukraine.

As stocks fell amid fears of war and a subsequent global energy crisis, Mr. Biden said the long-anticipated "invasion" had officially begun.

SEE ALSO: German chancellor halts Nord Stream 2 pipeline after Moscow recognizes separatist regions in Ukraine

He specifically blasted Mr. Putin's decision Monday to formally recognize as independent states the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. He said the move was a key step in Russia's plan to create a false pretext for war.

"Who in the Lord's name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries on territory that belongs to his neighbors?" Mr. Biden said. "He's setting up a rationale to take more territory by force. ... This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine."

'Starting a war'

Mr. Biden made his comments just hours after European officials said the first Russian forces had crossed into Donbas and after Russian lawmakers granted Mr. Putin permission to use military force outside their country.

One of Mr. Putin's top deputies opened the door to permanent military bases in Donetsk and Luhansk. Such a move would cement Russia's grip on those regions and give the Russian military much greater capability to launch ground attacks on Ukrainian territory.

There was growing fear that Mr. Putin ultimately may seek to push deeper into Ukraine to link Donetsk and Luhansk with the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia seized by military force in 2014.

Despite getting the green light from his parliament to go to war, Mr. Putin was coy about his ultimate goal. He seemed to leave open the door to mobilizing all of the roughly 190,000 Russian troops stationed along Ukraine's border for a full-scale invasion.

"I haven't said that the troops will go there right now," Mr. Putin said. "It's impossible to forecast a specific pattern of action. It will depend on a concrete situation as it takes shape on the ground."

To deescalate the conflict, Mr. Putin demanded that Ukraine recognize Russian sovereignty over Crimea. He also demanded that Ukraine renounce its bid to join NATO and partially demilitarize.

Those demands are nonstarters in Kyiv and within NATO. The U.S. has rejected in writing Russia's insistence that NATO never expand to include Ukraine.

The U.S. and NATO stressed that the door to diplomacy remained open and that Mr. Putin could avert a major land war in Europe, but hope for a peaceful resolution began to fade.

At a press conference alongside Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was scrapping plans for a meeting this week with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.

Foreign policy analysts said the world is standing on the edge of catastrophe.

“We’re at one of the most dangerous periods in our history, certainly since 1945,” former Defense Secretary William S. Cohen told CNN. “The danger that we face here is that once we take a step and then Putin responds to it, the cycle tends to escalate. In the event they go into Ukraine and in the event there are wayward missiles fired at Ukrainians but end up hitting some American forces in the region, then the United States has to respond. And up the ladder we climb.”

Mr. Biden sounded a similarly pessimistic note. He called out Russia’s construction of field hospitals along the Ukrainian border and the movement of wartime supplies such as fresh blood.

“You don’t need blood unless you plan on starting a war,” the president said.

The scope of Russia’s military push into Donbas remained murky. European officials said Russian troops were in the territories but it was not yet the full-scale invasion that the West had feared for months.

Regardless, the development represented a sharp escalation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy tried to tamp down panic among his people late Monday night.

“We are not afraid of anyone or anything. We don’t owe anyone anything. And we won’t give anything to anyone,” he said.

On Tuesday, Mr. Zelenskyy said he would call up some of the nation’s military reserves, signaling that Kyiv is preparing for a serious confrontation with Russian forces.

He said he would consider breaking formal diplomatic ties with the Kremlin. Earlier Tuesday, Kyiv recalled its ambassador in Moscow as diplomatic relations between the nations crumbled.

Russian officials did little to ease the tensions. Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko said Moscow’s agreement with the so-called independent regions of Donetsk and Luhansk allows for permanent Russian bases on their soil.

If established, such bases would represent a major blow to Ukrainian sovereignty and would reaffirm that Russia is able to seize Ukrainian territory by force.

“So far, there hasn’t been any talk about setting up bases,” Mr. Rudenko said, according to RT.com. “But, if necessary, we will do everything that needs to be done. The agreement stipulates that.”

First wave of sanctions

At the White House, Mr. Biden rolled out the first wave in a sanctions package that, if fully implemented, would be perhaps the harshest in history.

The president said he will impose penalties “far beyond” the sanctions levied in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea.

“If Russia goes further with this invasion, we stand prepared to go further as with sanctions,” the president said.

The sanctions announced Tuesday prohibit American financial institutions from processing transactions for Russia’s VEB and PSB banks. The move effectively cuts the banks out of transactions involving the U.S. dollar, the global reserve currency.

In 2014, the U.S. slapped sanctions on VEB that restricted U.S. individuals and companies from doing business with the institution.

During the first year, the bank sustained massive losses, leading to a multibillion-dollar bailout from the Russian government. The U.S. Treasury Department lifted those sanctions in 2019.

Mr. Biden said the Russian government would be blocked from accessing Western financing to service the country's debt. That means it can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade on its new debt in U.S. and European markets.

The U.S. also imposed sanctions on individual Russians, including Alexander Bortnikov, the director of Russia's Federal Security Service, which is the successor to the KGB. His son, Denis Bortnikov, also was sanctioned, as were Petr Fradkov, chairman and CEO of PSB, and Sergei Kiriyenko, a Russian politician.

The European Union and its member states, along with Britain, rolled out coordinated sanctions, which also explicitly targeted Russian banks and wealthy individuals.

Administration officials said Russia's largest banks could be the next targets of sweeping sanctions if Moscow further invades Ukraine.

"No Russian financial institution is safe if the invasion proceeds," an administration official told reporters. "This is only the sharp edge of the pain we can inflict."

Other sanctions available to the U.S. could be cutting off Russia from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT), a high-security network that connects financial institutions around the globe.

A removal of Russia would severely hamper its ability to do business with other countries. Shipments of metals, oil, gas and other commodities could stop for at least some time.

"We are not taking SWIFT off the table," the official said.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said his nation will take steps to halt the certification of the massive Nord Stream 2 Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline.

The landmark project has sparked controversy on both sides of the Atlantic. In Washington, critics have long warned that the pipeline would give Moscow far too much power over European energy supplies.

Mr. Scholz said his government will "reassess" the pipeline's future in light of Russian military actions in Ukraine.

"That will certainly take time, if I may say so," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/22 China: Russia legitimate security concerns
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/china-moscow-has-legitimate-security-concerns-nato/
GIST	<p>China on Tuesday appeared to back Russian grievances over Ukraine and NATO following Russian President Vladimir Putin's recognition Monday of two separatist enclaves in the eastern part of the country, noting what it called Moscow's "legitimate security concerns."</p> <p>Wang Wenbin, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, fielded inquiries from reporters on China's position on the Ukraine crisis and repeatedly sidestepped questions about support for Russian actions that the U.S. and allies have condemned as an invasion and violation of Kyiv's sovereignty.</p> <p>"China's position on the Ukraine issue is consistent," Mr. Wang said. "The legitimate security concerns of any country should be respected, and the purposes and principles of the UN Charter should be jointly upheld." Notably, China's state-controlled media was still not reporting the Russian military incursion hours after it happened the Ukrainian border.</p>

Mr. Wang then stated that events in Ukraine are the result of delays in implementing the 2015 Minsk-2 agreement that sought to resolve the standoff in Ukraine's Donbas region.

"The situation in Ukraine is getting worse," Mr. Wang said. "China once again calls on all parties to exercise restraint, appreciate the importance of implementing the principle of indivisible security, and de-escalate the situation and resolve differences through dialogue and negotiation."

The spokesman fielded questions in Beijing before Russian military forces moved into eastern Ukraine on what Moscow described as a "peacekeeping" operation for the two new "republics" the Kremlin now recognizes.

Mr. Wang declined to say whether China recognizes Russia's announced declaration Monday recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk enclaves. The spokesman also declined to say whether the Russian action violates the Minsk-2 protocol, which calls for a cease-fire in the Donbas as a political solution is negotiated.

Asked whether there are parallels between Russian assertions that Ukraine is not a separate nation and China's claim that Taiwan is part of China, Mr. Wang merely repeated Beijing's official line that Taiwan is part of China.

"We are closely following the latest developments in eastern Ukraine," he added. China has a major trade and investment relations with Kyiv, which has signed up for China's global "Belt and Road" funding program.

Mr. Wang also said China respects all nations' sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said Moscow's action in recognizing the independence of two Ukrainian regions is inconsistent with the principles of the UN Charter, something China has said it supports.

Asked about that charter violation, Mr. Wang said China would continue to communicate with all parties in the Ukraine dispute and "act accordingly."

China's embassy in Kyiv has notified Chinese nationals and businesses in Ukraine to exercise caution.

Mr. Wang also sidestepped questions on whether China will support U.S. and European sanctions on Russia or would aid Russia in responding to sanctions.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry and the State Department confirmed that Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi had spoken by phone about the Russian incursion Tuesday, but offered few details on what they discussed.

The Chinese Communist Party-affiliated Global Times news website said in an editorial Tuesday that the United States shared the blame for the Ukraine crisis because of Washington's "intensive containment on Russia, which finally forced Russia to try to realize its security demands" by recognizing the two Ukraine enclaves.

"China has no self-interest in the Ukraine issue. It has always upheld a fair and responsible attitude and will decide its own position based on the merits of the matter itself," the outlet said in an editorial. "The development of the Ukraine situation is the result of a series of complex factors. Now that it has come to the brink of a cliff, all parties should work together to pull it back."

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HEADLINE	02/22 Work underway: losing WA 'sixth reservoir'
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SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/tech/science/environment/preparing-for-the-loss-of-mountain-snowpack/281-761da6f8-3271-499d-9f04-4616a29b8602
GIST	<p>CLE ELUM, Wash. — Work is proceeding in the Yakima River Basin to prepare for climate change and the loss of snowpack.</p> <p>On the Kittitas Reclamation District, the construction of plastic-lined irrigation canals is in full swing.</p> <p>The district, formed in 1911 with roots dating back to the 1870s, is trying to stop as much precious irrigation water from leaking out of its network of canals as possible. Leaks have accounted for up to 30% of its water allocation.</p> <p>“It is becoming more alarming to us that we need to continue to work as fast as we can to implement conservation measures like this,” said Urban Eberhart, manager of the Kittitas Reclamation District (KRD).</p> <p>The work is part of a broader effort to keep and store water that climate scientists expect will keep coming as rain, even though less and less of it will be stored as snow. The University of Washington’s Climate Impacts Group, part of the College of the Environment, forecasts the state’s projected snowpack will decline 70% by the 2080s, relative to the historic averages between 1916 and 2006.</p> <p>“For the Yakima Project, we rely heavily on snowpack, and usually call it our sixth reservoir,” said Wendy Christensen, a civil engineer by training who works for the Bureau of Reclamation, the Federal agency that manages water around the west.</p> <p>With snowpack expected to melt away with climate change, more ways are being considered to store what would have been in that “sixth reservoir.”</p> <p>Life without the 'sixth reservoir'</p> <p>If you’ve crossed Snoqualmie Pass on Interstate 90, you’ve seen a piece of the Yakima Project. It’s the long lake on the south side off the interstate known as Keechelus Lake. It’s used for recreation, but it also holds water to irrigate farms in the Yakima Basin.</p> <p>The Bureau of Reclamation estimates that out of the state’s annual agriculture output - around \$10 billion - nearly \$450 million is grown in the Yakima Basin, which encompasses all or part of four counties.</p> <p>“We live in a rain shadow, so we get maybe five to seven inches a year,” said Christensen.</p> <p>The other major lakes are north. They include Cle Elum Lake and Kachess Lake. Engineers are looking to raise the water level in Cle Elum Lake by about 3 feet and looking to pump more water out of Kachess Lake during drought years.</p> <p>These are just pieces of what’s called the Yakima Integrated Plan. The Washington Department of Ecology places the cost at \$4.1 billion. Christensen estimates it as a range from \$3 bill to \$5 billion, depending on what gets built.</p> <p>The Yakima Integrate Plan is also designed to bring back salmon and other fish including endangered bull trout. KRD estimates salmon runs can be boosted from less than 25,000 fish to over 300,000 by “improving fish passage to the Yakima Basin’s headwaters and restoring river and stream habitat.”</p> <p>The Yakima Integrate Plan involves federal, state, tribal, and local entities.</p> <p>In 2013, the irrigation district helped the State of Washington acquire private forest land called the Teanaway Community Forest, named for a key river flowing into the Yakima River at Cle Elum, which is also a fish hatchery run by the Yakima Nation.</p> <p>On the Naches River system, a much smaller Bumping Lake could also be raised and expanded.</p>

The moves are not without controversy, with private property owners raising concerns about lake levels getting too high or too low. Lakes such as Kachess would only be too low during a major drought, according to the Bureau of Reclamation.

Then there's the creation of a new reservoir, which would connect to the Yakima River in the Yakima Canyon at a place called Wymer in Kittitas County. A Wymer lake would create another 162,000-[acre-feet](#).

"We're looking at needing about 450,000-[acre-feet](#) of storage just to shore up our existing needs," said Christensen.

The impacts of a drought

Farmers and ranchers in the Yakima Basin have experienced 11 droughts between 1926 and 2020, according to Christensen. Six of those have come in the last 30 years: 1992, 1993, 1994, 2001, 2005, and 2015.

During drought years, farmers who have "[junior water rights](#)" can have their water allocations cut dramatically. Christensen said that in 2001, farmers barely received more than one-third of their water, 37%. That can mean death for a big investment like apple orchards, where dead and dying trees are pulled out.

The Yakima Integrated Plan should help that.

"We're looking to getting them up to 70% of their supply, which for them would be a survivable drought, it would not be ideal," Christensen said, adding that farmers would have enough water to where they're not having to pull out trees.

It could take three decades to fully implement the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan, but in numerous places, that work has already started.

"You are looking at a climate adaptation strategy in effect right now," said Eberhart. "We are preparing for a future without snowpack."

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HEADLINE	02/22 Seattle pauses effort clear homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/seattle-city-council-gets-bleak-picture-about-crime-loss-of-police-officers
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Citing concerns about record-low temperatures in the weather forecast, Seattle city officials indicated Tuesday that they have paused the effort to remove a two-block homeless encampment that has sprung up right in front of City Hall.</p> <p>The city planned to open temporary shelters and warming centers that will remain open through Saturday morning, meaning that the encampment at 4th Ave. between James and Columbia streets will remain until after the bitterly cold weather has passed.</p> <p>The city had indicated that the camp would be cleared last Sunday but did not follow through on that plan.</p> <p>There are two indisputable homeless facts in Seattle: the city has a homeless crisis.</p> <p>"This is a city sidewalk, right across from City Hall!" said Andrea Saurez, founder of We Heart Seattle, a non-profit organization that works with homeless encampments, adding that her volunteers decided on their own to visit the site on Monday and offer to help by cleaning up trash at the site and giving people</p>

living in the encampment reusable water bottles. "If we just let people languish here as some sort of civic right to occupy a sidewalk they are not doing anybody any favors."

The second homeless fact is that the city doesn't have enough affordable housing.

"We do need more space," said Sam Wolff, spokesperson for the Public Defender Association, adding that he worries about what will happen to the campers if their encampment is removed. "It's harmful for people living here if they get displaced and shuffled around the city without a place to go. People deserve to be indoors and have services that fit their needs."

KOMO News met two people living in tents on the sidewalk.

Lindsay told us she'd welcome a hotel room.

"It's cold out here," she said, adding that no one has offered her any housing assistance. "I'd take a hotel room in a heartbeat!"

"I would take an apartment," said Lavell, who is confined to a wheelchair. He said after he said he lost some toes to frostbite a few years while being homeless.

But some campers do want to stay put, and activists who have set up a station at a nearby parking lot are encouraging campers to stay put, insisting the city's efforts are a sweep not a move to help those unhoused.

The city said on Monday its goal was to house the homeless in downtown, but that the encampment is considered an obstruction on the sidewalk and a hazard that must be removed.

A spokesperson for the Mayor's office said in such a scenario the city will connect campers with shelter when available.

Wolff isn't sure why the encampment wasn't cleared on Sunday, but he has worked with the city on other projects. He said he was confident he knows what does work.

"We've seen when you offer attractive lodging, they want to go!" Wolff said, adding that his group through city and county funding is leasing three hotels to house their homeless clients. "They're attractive rooms with services."

Wolff said his group over the past 18 months has managed JustCARE, an outreach program that has facilitated in the removal of eight major city encampments, including the one at City Hall Park next to the court house; one on 3rd Ave.; and just last week an encampment of about 20 people at 4th Ave. and Pike Street.

"Effective work involves being client-centered," he said. "And having the resources they need."

But he knows finding space to move into is not always possible and that may be an issue for campers living in the shadow of Seattle City Hall.

Wolff said even if JustCARE wanted to help and house the campers their city and county funding runs out in June.

"We address needs, help stabilize, and help people move on to permanent housing," he said, said his group and its partners have helped about 400 people move inside.

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HEADLINE	02/22 US, allies impose sanctions on Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/us/politics/us-russia-ukraine-sanctions.html

WASHINGTON — The United States and its allies on Tuesday swiftly imposed economic sanctions on Russia for what President Biden denounced as the beginning of an “invasion of Ukraine,” unveiling a set of coordinated punishments as Western officials confirmed that Russian forces had begun crossing the Ukrainian border.

Speaking from the White House, Mr. Biden condemned President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and said the immediate consequences for his aggression against Ukraine included the loss of a key natural gas pipeline and cutting off global financing to two Russian banks and a handful of the country’s elites.

“Who in the Lord’s name does Putin think gives him the right to declare new so-called countries on territory that belonged to his neighbors?” Mr. Biden said on Tuesday afternoon, joining a cascade of criticism from global leaders earlier in the day. “This is a flagrant violation of international law and demands a firm response from the international community.”

Mr. Biden warned Mr. Putin that more sanctions would follow if the Russian leader did not withdraw his forces and engage in diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

But that prospect remained dim by the end of the day, as Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken canceled plans to meet with the Russian foreign minister on Thursday, saying that it does not “make sense” to hold talks while Russian forces are on the move.

“To put it simply, Russia just announced that it is carving out a big chunk of Ukraine,” Mr. Biden said, adding, “He’s setting up a rationale to take more territory by force.”

The global response began early on Tuesday, just hours after Mr. Putin recognized the self-declared separatist states in eastern Ukraine and Russian forces started rolling into their territory, according to NATO, European Union and White House officials. It was the first major deployment of Russian troops across the internationally recognized border since the current crisis began.

At a news conference in Moscow, Mr. Putin said that he had not decided to send in troops “right at this moment.” But officials said the invasion started overnight, just hours before Mr. Putin’s Parliament formally granted him the authority to deploy the military abroad. Ukrainians near the territory controlled by Kremlin-backed separatists have already endured days of shelling, and as Ukrainian troops hunkered down in their trenches and civilians took shelter in basements, the country’s military said that one soldier had been killed so far and six wounded.

Financial markets around the world wobbled on Tuesday in the wake of the Russian actions and the response from Western governments. In the United States, the news pushed stocks lower, leaving the S&P 500 in correction territory, more than 10 percent below its January peak. Oil prices, which had risen to nearly \$100 a barrel in anticipation of a global disruption, settled at \$96.84 a barrel, up 1.5 percent.

Mr. Biden and his counterparts in Germany, England and other European nations described the package of global sanctions as severe. They include financial directives by the United States to deny Russia the ability to borrow money in Western markets and to block financial transactions by two banks and the families of three wealthy Russian elites.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany put the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline on hold. The \$11 billion conduit from Russia to Germany — completed but not yet operational — is crucial to Moscow’s plans to increase energy sales to Europe. European Union foreign ministers and the British government approved sanctions against legislators in Moscow who voted to authorize the use of force, as well as Russian elites, companies and organizations.

“It will hurt a lot,” said the E.U. foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell Fontelles.

The governments of Japan, Taiwan and Singapore also issued a joint statement saying they would limit technology exports to Russia in an effort to pressure Mr. Putin with damaging restrictions on his ambitions to compete in high-tech industries.

But the moves in Washington and other capitals around the world were limited in scope and fell short of the more sweeping economic warfare that some — including members of Congress and other supporters of Ukraine — have repeatedly demanded in recent weeks.

Mr. Biden and his counterparts have said they must balance the need to take swift and severe action with preserving the possibility of even greater sanctions on Russia if Mr. Putin escalates the conflict by trying to seize more territory claimed by the separatists, or even the entire country — a war that could kill tens of thousands of people.

“This is the beginning of a Russian invasion of Ukraine,” he said, adding that “we’ll continue to escalate sanctions if Russia escalates.”

European leaders also vowed to get tougher if Mr. Putin’s forces continued to advance. Prime Minister Boris Johnson described British sanctions as just “the first tranche.”

Mr. Biden’s use of the word “invasion” was significant. In the past, he had angered the Ukrainian leadership when he suggested that there might be lesser penalties for a “minor incursion.” Now that Mr. Putin has ordered forces into eastern Ukraine, Mr. Biden, in his choice of words, is making clear that there is nothing minor about the operation.

But that still leaves open the question of how to calibrate the sanctions — because so far there have been no mass casualties. Jonathan Finer, the president’s deputy national security adviser, said early Tuesday that the administration could hold back some of its promised punishments in the hopes of deterring further, far more violent aggression by Mr. Putin aimed at taking the rest of the country.

“We’ve always envisioned waves of sanctions that would unfold over time in response to steps Russia actually takes, not just statements that they make,” Mr. Finer said on CNN. “We’ve always said we’re going to watch the situation on the ground and have a swift and severe response.”

Crucially, it remains unclear how far Mr. Putin — who has argued that Ukraine itself is a phony country, wrongly carved away from Russia — is prepared to go. On Tuesday, he said ominously that he recognized the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk republics’ sovereignty over not only the land they control, but also the much larger portion of Ukraine that they lay claim to, home to 2.5 million people.

Russia has built an enormous military force along Ukraine’s border that appears prepared to attack from the north, east and south.

At a hastily called news conference on Tuesday, Mr. Putin demanded that Ukraine vow never to join NATO, give up the advanced weapons the West has delivered to it, recognize Russia’s annexation of Crimea and negotiate directly with the Luhansk and Donetsk separatists, who are seen in Kyiv and Western capitals as illegitimate Kremlin proxies.

“The most important point is a known degree of demilitarization of Ukraine today,” Mr. Putin said. “This is the only objectively controllable factor that can be observed and reacted to.”

A deputy Russian defense minister, Nikolai Pankov, claimed that Ukraine had gathered 60,000 troops to attack the Russia-backed separatist enclaves in the country’s east — a step that Ukraine denies having any plans to take. Mr. Pankov’s remarks offered little evidence that a peaceful end to the conflict between the two countries was in sight.

“Negotiations have reached a dead end,” he said in a televised speech. “The Ukrainian leadership has taken the path of violence and bloodshed.”

Mr. Biden's announcement of the new sanctions was equally grim. He said the United States was imposing "full blocking" on two large Russian financial institutions and "comprehensive sanctions" on Russian debt.

"That means we've cut off Russia's government from Western finance," he said. "It can no longer raise money from the West and cannot trade in its new debt on our markets or European markets, either."

He also said that the United States would impose sanctions on Russian elites and their families, an effort to ensure that those closest to Mr. Putin do not escape the financial pain that is expected to hit hard for average Russian citizens.

Daleep Singh, a deputy national security adviser, called the sanctions announced on Tuesday "only the sharp edge of the pain we can inflict."

Mr. Singh described the two banks as a "glorified piggy bank of the Kremlin" and a financier "of the activities of the Russian military." The banks will be prohibited from making transactions in the United States or Europe, and their assets in the U.S. will be frozen.

Mr. Singh said the sanctions against the Russian elites and their families would punish those who "shared in the corrupt gains of the Kremlin, and they will now share in the pain."

American officials have worried for weeks that imposing severe sanctions on Russia could also have consequences in the United States, including higher gas prices. Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said Americans should be prepared for the conflict with Russia to have that result.

Asked about Mr. Biden's proposed summit with Mr. Putin, Ms. Psaki said the administration was still open to diplomacy. "That remains an option," she said of a potential meeting, but only if Russia de-escalates hostilities toward Ukraine.

By day's end in eastern Ukraine, there was no immediate sign of major military escalation, but fearful Ukrainians boarded buses out of the separatist areas as the country's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, urged his nation to "keep a cool head" in the crisis.

Mr. Zelensky insisted that Ukraine would not yield territory, and his defense minister, Oleksiy Reznikov, appeared to be girding his country's troops for battle.

"Ahead will be a difficult trial," Mr. Reznikov said in a somber message released by the military. "There will be losses. You will have to go through pain and overcome fear and despondency."

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HEADLINE	02/22 Sanctions hold Putin back in Ukraine?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/us/politics/russia-biden-sanctions-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — When the Obama administration imposed sanctions on Russia for invading Ukraine in 2014, American officials were hopeful they would deter President Vladimir V. Putin from further aggression.</p> <p>Some of the officials argue today that the sanctions prevented Mr. Putin from ordering Russian forces beyond where they had halted on the Crimean Peninsula and in the eastern Donbas region. But Mr. Putin held on to Crimea. And on Monday, he ordered more troops into an insurgent-controlled area of eastern Ukraine where thousands of Russian soldiers have been operating and said the Kremlin was recognizing two enclaves as independent states.</p> <p>Now, President Biden, who as vice president helped oversee Ukraine policy in 2014, has to weigh what sanctions might compel Mr. Putin to halt his new offensive, which the White House has judged to be an</p>

“invasion.” The White House is taking a step-by-step approach, trying to calibrate each tranche of measures to Mr. Putin’s actions.

“I’m going to begin to impose sanctions in response, far beyond the steps we and our allies and partners implemented in 2014,” Mr. Biden said on Tuesday in announcing [a new set of sanctions](#). “And if Russia goes further with this invasion, we stand prepared to go further.”

While American officials have studied the effects of sanctions imposed since 2014 and sharpened techniques, Mr. Putin has had years to make his country’s \$1.5 trillion economy more insular so that parts of Russia would be shielded from tough penalties. Speaking to reporters on Friday, he boasted that his country had grown more self-sufficient in the face of “illegitimate” Western sanctions, [according to](#) Russia’s Tass news service. He added that in the future, it would be “important for us to raise the level of our economic sovereignty.”

And perhaps most notably, Mr. Putin and his closest aides and partners in Moscow might not suffer much themselves from sanctions, analysts say.

Mr. Putin’s decision on Monday to press ahead with the troop movement suggests that he has concluded that the costs of new sanctions are tolerable, despite U.S. talk of “massive consequences” for his country. Several of his top aides made that point in choreographed speeches to him in a meeting of his Security Council on Monday in Moscow.

If Russian officials are firm in that mind-set, the Biden administration might find it has to impose the absolute harshest sanctions — ones that would inflict suffering on many ordinary citizens — or look for a noneconomic option, such as giving greater military aid to an insurgency in Ukraine. Mr. Biden has said [he will not send American troops](#) to defend Ukraine.

Some of the hard-line nationalist men around Mr. Putin were already on a Treasury Department sanctions list and accept that they and their families will no longer have substantial ties to the United States or Europe for the rest of their lives, said [Alexander Gabuev](#), the chair of the Russia in the Asia-Pacific Program at the Carnegie Moscow Center.

“They are the powerful everybodies in today’s Russia,” he said. “There is a lot of posh richness. They’re totally secluded. They’re the kings, and that can be secured in Russia only.”

Furthermore, because of their roles in state-owned enterprises and their business ties, they are “the very guys who are directly benefiting from the economy becoming more insulated, more detached from the outside world,” he added.

They have also adopted a siege mentality rooted in an ideological belief about the United States and its sanctions policies that Mr. Putin regularly pushes. “He says, ‘It’s not because of actions I take, but it’s because we’re rising as a power, and the Americans want to punish us for standing up to hegemonism,’” Mr. Gabuev said. “I think that’s genuine. The bulk of my contacts in the government believe that.”

The sanctions announced by the United States on Tuesday include penalties against three sons of senior officials close to Mr. Putin and two state-owned banks, as well as further restrictions on Russia’s ability to raise revenue by issuing sovereign debt. The costs are not expected to be felt widely in Russia — the two banks are policy institutions and do not have retail operations — but American officials could eventually announce more painful steps.

That announcement followed an executive order issued by Mr. Biden on Monday night that prohibits business dealings between Americans and entities in the Russia-backed eastern enclaves in Ukraine. The Biden administration would also have the authority to impose sanctions on anyone operating in those areas, a U.S. official said.

Britain announced Tuesday that it was freezing the assets of five Russian banks and imposing sanctions on three Russian billionaires and certain members of Parliament. And Germany said it was [halting certification](#) of the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline that would connect to Russia.

Officials from the White House, State Department and Treasury Department have spent weeks coordinating a response with European leaders and major financial institutions and say they are able to act almost immediately as Russia escalates its actions.

Some experts say that if the Biden administration follows through on the most severe options that officials have suggested are possible — most notably severing the country's top banks, including Sberbank and VTB, from transactions with non-Russian entities — Russia could suffer a financial panic that triggers a stock market crash and rapid inflation. The effects would most likely strike not only billionaire oligarchs but also middle-class and lower-income families. Russian enterprises would also be unable to receive payment for energy exports.

Besides isolating Russian state-owned banks, the escalatory sanctions that U.S. officials have prepared would also cut off the ability to purchase critical technologies from American companies.

If the United States imposes the harshest penalties, “there will be unexpected and unpredictable consequences for global markets,” said Maria Snegovaya, a visiting scholar at George Washington University who co-wrote an Atlantic Council paper on U.S. sanctions on Russia.

Edward Fishman, a top State Department sanctions official in the Obama administration, called Mr. Biden's action on Tuesday a modest first step intended as “a shot across the bow.”

Mr. Fishman said the administration's move against one of the two targeted banks — VEB, the country's main development bank — was the first time the United States had fully cut off a state-owned Russian financial institution. “I interpret that as a warning that the Biden administration is prepared to cut off other major Russian banks from the U.S. financial system,” Mr. Fishman said.

“Biden is giving Putin an opportunity to step away from the brink,” he added. “But he's also signaling that, if Putin unleashes a full-scale war, the economic costs will be immense.”

A severe economic disruption could test Mr. Putin's control of his country. But many analysts are skeptical that the United States and its European allies will follow through with the toughest options that they have considered, as they may be discouraged by fears over collateral damage to their own economies.

And no Western officials have even proposed choking the lifeblood of Russia's economy by cutting off its lucrative energy exports. Experts say that a move against Russian energy revenues would have the biggest impact, but that it would also lead to a precarious political situation for Mr. Biden and other world leaders as oil and gas prices rise in a period of high global inflation.

The Russian government has spent years trying to reconfigure its budget and finances so that it can withstand further sanctions, efforts that have been aided by high market prices for oil and gas. It has relatively low debt and relies less on loans from foreign entities than it did before 2014. Most importantly, the central bank has accumulated foreign currency reserves of \$631 billion, the fourth-largest such reserve in the world.

Some important Russian state-owned enterprises and private companies have actually benefited from U.S. sanctions. Kremlin policies aimed at replacing Western imports with Russian and non-Western products wind up raising the profits of those businesses. And some of Mr. Putin's allies and their families have done well under the initiatives. One example is Dmitry Patrushev, the minister of agriculture, whose family has become wealthier from new agriculture industry policies, Mr. Gabuev said.

President Xi Jinping of China, who has been strengthening his nation's ties with Russia, could help Mr. Putin get around some of the sanctions or bolster Russia's economy with greater energy purchases. When

the two leaders met in Beijing at the start of the Winter Olympics, their governments announced a 30-year contract in which China would purchase gas through a new pipeline running across Siberia. Chinese companies might also be able to fill some of the supply chain gaps created by a stoppage in certain U.S. technology exports to Russia, though those companies are unable to replicate more advanced American products.

Chinese leaders would probably be careful about having its large state-owned banks continue to do business overtly with any Russian banks that are under U.S. sanctions, but China has ways to keep some transactions hidden.

“They’ve developed a lot of e-payment and digital workarounds,” said [Daniel Russel](#), a former assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs and an executive at the Asia Society. “There are all kinds of fairly sophisticated barter systems they’ve been employing. Thirdly, they can hide behind a lot of black market stuff.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Canada ends freeze to protesters accounts
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/world/americas/canada-protest-finance.html
GIST	<p>OTTAWA — With the capital’s streets cleared of the heavy trucks and cars that made some of them impassable for three long weeks of protest, Canadian authorities said Tuesday that they were lifting freezes on hundreds of bank accounts associated with protest organizers and Canadians who had blockaded Ottawa’s streets with their vehicles.</p> <p>Isabelle Jacques, an assistant deputy minister in Canada’s department of finance, told a House of Commons committee that the banks had begun unlocking accounts on Monday and that no more finances would be locked up.</p> <p>“The vast majority of assets are in the process of being unfrozen,” she said.</p> <p>When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau decided a week ago to invoke his country’s Emergencies Act for the first time in Canadian history to quell the unrest, it gave the police sweeping new powers to go after the finances of the protesters.</p> <p>Ms. Jacques said that those measures are now being lifted because they were intended to pressure protesters to leave the city’s streets.</p> <p>Some may now face long-term consequences, even with the freezes lifted.</p> <p>But for one protest organizer who was arrested last week, the effect was more immediate. The organizer, Tamara Lich, said she had been frozen out of all of her accounts and could come up with only 5,000 Canadian dollars for bail.</p> <p>The issue may be moot: On Tuesday, the court denied bail.</p> <p>Justice Julie Bourgeois said she was not convinced that if freed, Ms. Lich would leave Ottawa or stop encouraging others to keep blocking roads. “You have had plenty of opportunity to remove yourself and even others from this criminal activity,” she said, “but obstinately chose not to and persistently counseled others not to either.”</p> <p>Justice Bourgeois noted that Ms. Lich likely faces a “lengthy” sentence if convicted.</p> <p>About the time the bail hearing was taking place, lawmakers in the Canadian Senate began debate over Mr. Trudeau’s Emergencies Act order. The evening earlier, overcoming opposition from Conservative members of Parliament, Mr. Trudeau persuaded the House of Commons to endorse his decision.</p>

After the declaration was made, the police began turning over the names of organizers and people who actively blocked Ottawa's roads with their trucks and other vehicles during the blockade, which was set off by opposition to the government's pandemic restrictions.

As of Sunday, the national police force said in a statement, 219 "financial products" had been frozen, 253 Bitcoin addresses related to protesters and organizers had been given to virtual currency exchange operators, and a bank had frozen 3.8 million Canadian dollars held by a payment processor.

Ms. Lich, who is from Alberta, was the driving force behind a GoFundMe campaign that raised more than 10 million Canadian dollars for the protest. About one million dollars was turned over to her before the crowdfunding site shut down the campaign. The authorities charged Ms. Lich on Thursday with counseling to commit mischief, a serious offense under Canadian criminal law.

All of the accounts that were frozen were to remain so for up to 30 days from Feb. 14, the date of the national emergency declaration. But the government could extend or shorten that period — and that is what it said it was doing late Tuesday.

Leah West, a professor specializing in national security law at Carleton University in Ottawa, said there would most likely be lasting effects for the protesters and organizers when it comes to their finances.

"Down the road," Professor West said, "banks may decide that these are not people they want to provide financial services to because they've engaged in illegal activity. Would someone want to give you a mortgage if you used your house to deal drugs? Probably not."

In the face of the large-scale police operation that began clearing the streets on Friday, many of the protesters drove away to avoid being arrested and having their vehicles seized. By Monday morning, the police had arrested 196 people and accused them of either organizing the blockade or participating in it, and towed 115 vehicles. In the initial days of the protest, there were more than 400 vehicles occupying downtown streets.

Some of the protesters did not go very far.

After leaving the streets of the capital, one small group set up a new camp Sunday across from a truck stop on the Trans-Canada highway about 100 kilometers east of Ottawa. As participants were busy setting up food canteens and arranging firewood stockpiles, a leader who would only be identified as Eric declined to discuss their plans.

Mr. Trudeau told the House of Commons that there were two other small groups outside the city.

Ottawa's acting police chief, Steve Bell, said last week that the police would continue to work "for months" to track down protest participants.

"If you are involved in this protest, we will actively look to identify you and follow up with financial sanctions and criminal charges," Chief Bell said.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Seattle: residential evictions to resume
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-city-council-effort-to-extend-moratorium-fails-residential-evictions-to-resume-next-week/
GIST	<p>After the Seattle City Council declined Tuesday to extend a moratorium, residential evictions will resume in the city next week, though many renter protections remain in place.</p> <p>Earlier this month, Mayor Bruce Harrell chose to end the city's COVID-19 emergency ban on residential evictions Feb. 28, after nearly two years, prompting a resolution introduced last week by Councilmember</p>

Kshama Sawant that would have extended the moratorium indefinitely, through the end of the city's overall coronavirus civil emergency order.

The resolution failed 5-3 Tuesday, with Sawant, Councilmember Lisa Herbold and Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda supporting the effort. Council President Debora Juarez and Councilmembers Andrew Lewis, Sara Nelson, Alex Pedersen and Dan Strauss voted against the resolution. Councilmember Tammy Morales was on an excused absence.

A last-minute amendment by Herbold, which would have extended the moratorium through April 30, thus giving council members time find alternatives to address those facing eviction, also failed 5-3, with just Herbold, Mosqueda and Strauss in favor.

"While I could support a moratorium that was connected to a date certain, I do have trouble supporting and voting for a moratorium that is vague in its end date, because I do think that we need to understand what the cliff we are facing is and address it with the resources that are needed," said Strauss, the only member to support the amendment but not the original resolution.

With no council action Tuesday, the moratorium will end Monday, allowing evictions to resume on March 1 in many cases, though a slew of other council protections passed throughout the pandemic provide some safeguards for renters facing financial burden.

The city still has \$25 million of the \$59 million allocated for rental assistance in 2021, available for renters and landlords facing financial difficulty during the pandemic. Harrell and multiple council members have recognized rental assistance as the primary defense against an uptick in evictions after the moratorium is lifted.

"The most important thing for me that I've been looking at — both for the amendment in front of us that I think, again, strengthens the approach here today and the underlying bill — is making sure that we get all of the rental assistance dollars out the door," Mosqueda, who supported the amendment and Sawant's original resolution, said before the vote.

But for the city to resolve unpaid rents, there needs to not only be enough funding but also a concerted effort to distribute the funding, Mosqueda said.

"I want to note that I've been reaching out to our state legislative partners, asking for more rental assistance dollars for Seattle and hoping that our state budget and our champions in the state Legislature will help provide dollars to King County that get passed through to our city," Mosqueda said. "We've also been in communication with the [Seattle] Office of Housing to get the remaining rental assistance out the door as fast as possible."

For those behind on rent or facing eviction on March 1, Juarez — who voted against the amendment and the resolution — noted that the city also has several policies in place that will stop certain evictions.

"When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the city council and the mayor were leaders in passing protections of renters," Juarez said, noting that the eviction moratorium was enacted by former Mayor Jenny Durkan less than two weeks after the city entered a state of emergency in 2020. "We were one of the first [cities] in the country to understand the gravity of the economic recession, especially for low-income renters."

While Juarez emphasized that the moratorium was intended to be temporary, she said the protections will make the lifting of the moratorium "as humane as possible." Among those protections are:

- A winter eviction ban passed in February 2020 which prohibits evictions that would result in tenants having to vacate between Dec. 1 and March 1;
- An ordinance passed in May 2020 that allows tenants to use an inability to pay rent due to financial hardship as a defense against eviction in court for six months after the end of the moratorium;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ordinance passed in May 2020 that requires landlords to allow tenants who miss rent payments within six months of the civil emergency order (not the moratorium) ending to repay the owed amount in installments. Tenants who owe one month of rent or less can repay the amount in three monthly installments, while those who between one and two months of rent can pay in five installments and those who owe more than two months can pay over six monthly installments; • A council bill passed in March 2021 providing the right to legal counsel for Seattle renters facing eviction.
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HEADLINE	02/22 Measles exposure: SEA, Seattle Children's
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/possible-measles-exposure-at-sea-tac-airport-seattle-childrens-officials-warn/
GIST	<p>Public health officials announced on Monday a measles infection in a Snohomish County infant who recently returned to Washington after traveling in South Asia.</p> <p>The Snohomish Health District is continuing to monitor the health status of the exposed family and is warning of a possible public exposure before the diagnosis.</p> <p>The department said people may have been exposed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Feb. 19, between 11:45 a.m. and 2:45 p.m. • The emergency room lobby of Seattle Children's hospital on Feb. 20, between 12:34 a.m. and 2:49 a.m. <p>Snohomish health officials, Public Health – Seattle & King County and the state Department of Health have been contacting the two locations to alert them of the potential exposures, according to a Monday news release.</p> <p>Measles is highly contagious. Symptoms include fever, rash, cough and red, watery eyes, and can begin seven to 21 days after exposure. The disease is primarily spread through the air.</p> <p>People who were at the two locations during the listed times are advised to promptly call a health care provider if they get a fever or illness with an unexplained rash between now and March 12. To avoid the potential of spreading measles to others, people should not go to a clinic or hospital without calling first to notify about a measles concern.</p> <p>According to the Snohomish Health District, most people in the Puget Sound area are vaccinated against measles. People are also considered immune if they were born before 1957, have a blood test result showing immunity to measles or have previously been diagnosed with measles.</p> <p>Measles are relatively rare in Snohomish County and Washington state. In the last five years, Snohomish County confirmed seven other measles cases — one in 2019 and six in 2018.</p> <p>In 2019, Washington state saw a measles outbreak with 71 confirmed cases after a child traveled to Clark County from Ukraine. The outbreak primarily affected children between the ages of 1 and 18. Only 4% of those cases were among fully vaccinated individuals, according to the county health department.</p> <p>According to local health officials, small clusters of cases often occur after an individual travels from another country where measles is more common. Larger outbreaks occur if the virus enters a network with low vaccination.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Latest supply chain casualty: beer
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/the-latest-supply-chain-casualty-your-favorite-six-pack-of-beer/
GIST	The cost to make beer is soaring. The price to buy it is catching up.

Up until this point, brewers have largely absorbed the ballooning expenses for their ingredients, including barley, aluminum cans, paperboard and trucking.

But as high costs persist longer than many had hoped, brewers are forced to make the inevitable decision: raising prices on their beer.

“Something has to give,” said Bart Watson, chief economist at the national Brewers Association.

As bars closed and consumers took more beverages home during the pandemic, liquor store sales grew 25% from 2019 to 2021, according to federal data. Breweries, distilleries and wineries started churning out more retail products to meet the demand for at-home drinking.

Here’s the problem: There weren’t enough aluminum cans and glass bottles to package this extra beverage volume, so packaging prices soared. Aluminum can suppliers started favoring their biggest customers, who could afford to place larger, more expensive orders.

“It has been a stress on our business to have so much of our business in cans, and that’s led to a lot of these issues in the supply chain,” said Tom Whisenand, chief executive of Indeed Brewing in Minneapolis. “We recently did price increases to help cope with this, but the increases are not nearly enough to cover the cost increases we’re seeing.”

The prices for many of the essential elements of beer making and selling have surged in the past two years as a global supply chain struggles to untangle itself from the late-pandemic buying frenzy. Many brewers cite trucking and labor costs — and the increased time it takes to get supplies and ingredients — as their biggest increases.

Even the world’s largest beer manufacturers are passing on their higher costs to consumers. AB InBev (Budweiser), Molson Coors, and Constellation Brands (Corona) have told investors they have been raising prices and will continue to do so.

Heineken told investors this month that the price increases it must push through are high enough that consumers might buy less of its beer.

“As we continue to take these quite assertive price increases ... the big question is indeed whether disposable incomes will be hit to the point that it will dampen overall consumer spend and beer spend as well,” Heineken chief executive Dolf Van Den Brink said.

The price increases on beer, wine and liquor have only just begun, said Scott Scanlon, a beverage expert and vice president at Chicago-based market research firm IRI.

“We’re going to see a lot of manufacturers take price (increases),” Scanlon said. “That is only going to increase, probably higher than it has.”

So far, he said, consumers have taken it in stride. Just as higher grocery bills are offset by dining out less, a bigger tab at liquor stores is being absorbed by a lack of travel and entertainment expenses.

Even as some of those expenses return and other bills grow, Scanlon expects alcohol sales to be resilient.

“It’s that affordable indulgence,” he said. “This is the product that people are not going to want to give up.”

Home bartenders

The aluminum shortage and last year’s drought-stricken barley crop — when the U.S. recorded one of its lowest barley harvests in more than a century — have given brewers some of the biggest supply chain squeezes. But all alcohol categories are facing cost pressures.

“I don’t think you’ll talk to anybody in liquor who is not disappointed with their glass supply,” said Andy England, chief executive of Minnesota’s largest distillery, Phillips. “And there is always a random ingredient, when everything else is figured out, that keeps us from growing more.”

The widespread reliance on “just-in-time” manufacturing collapsed under the weight of huge consumer demand triggered by the surge of consumer spending following the pandemic’s initial lockdowns and layoffs in 2020. This just-in-time system was designed to keep costs down for everyone by having ingredients and packaging supplies delivered only as they were needed.

“COVID just destroyed the models people built,” England said. “Manufacturers say I need to order more of everything because I’m worried about scarcity, and all of a sudden suppliers can’t supply enough.”

Last fall, the Brewers Association wrote to the Federal Trade Commission about the aluminum can shortage, which is expected to last until 2024 when new production capacity can finally catch up.

“Craft brewers have and will continue to find it harder to compete with larger brewers not facing similar shortages and price increases in aluminum cans,” Bob Pease, the association’s president, wrote. “Where product becomes unavailable, the impact can last long after supply becomes available again,” as retailers and restaurants fill shelves and taps with other products.

Many craft brewers, especially those without long-term contracts that provide a level of cost stability, are expected to follow the lead of big brewers in raising prices — if they haven’t already.

The alternative would be to shrink profit margins, to which many craft brewers would reply: What profit margin?

“There isn’t really a profit margin to speak of,” said Dave Hoops, owner of Hoops Brewing in Duluth. “I think it’s about staying afloat, keeping level, fighting off a million things... and keeping beer relevant.”

Accepting higher prices

The psychology of inflation may help to ease the pain of price increases, Scanlon said. Higher prices for pints at restaurants and a faster increase in the price of other groceries may make that extra dollar or two for a six-pack or bottle of vodka less shocking.

“Consumers may go in thinking, ‘The price of that product I really enjoy is not going up as much,’ ” he said.

The Brewers Association is preparing for another year of elevated costs in barley, aluminum cans and freight.

Meanwhile, Whisenand at Indeed Brewing said there is only so much room to control other costs, which led to the recent price increase.

“We need to increase our costs to compete to be a quality employer and have quality beer,” he said, but at the same time: “Breweries believe very strongly that beer should be, in a sense, affordable — one of the greatest affordable luxuries in the world.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Home price growth picks up again
SOURCE	https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-02-22/home-price-appreciation-picks-up-once-again-in-u-s-cities
GIST	U.S. home-price appreciation picked up in December.

	<p>A measure of home prices in 20 U.S. cities gained 18.6%, up from 18.3% the previous month, the S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index showed Tuesday. It was a bigger gain than economists expected and came after the growth in home prices had slowed slightly for fourth straight months.</p> <p>Phoenix reported the biggest year-over-year gain at 32.5%. It was the 31st straight month the Arizona city led the list, according to the data released Tuesday. Tampa, Florida, and Miami posted December gains of 29% and 27%, respectively.</p> <p>Demand for homes is still strong almost two years after the pandemic hit the U.S. With inventory in short supply, bidding wars are still common across the country, shutting out buyers who are stretching their budgets. Rising mortgage rates, meanwhile, are making it even harder for some buyers to find properties they can afford.</p> <p>The S&P CoreLogic Case-Shiller index of national property values climbed 18.8%, the same increase as the prior month. The index had declined for three straight months prior to December.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Big Tech's big bet: offices still the future
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/22/technology/big-tech-offices.html
GIST	<p>TEMPE, Ariz. — Early in the pandemic, when shops along Mill Avenue in downtown Tempe closed their doors and students at nearby Arizona State University were asked to go home, the roar of construction continued to fill the air. Now, gleaming in the sunlight and stuffed with amenities, towering glass office buildings have sprouted up all over the Phoenix metropolitan area.</p> <p>Arizonans are about to have new next-door neighbors. And they include some of the technology industry's biggest names.</p> <p>DoorDash, the food delivery company, moved into a new building on the edge of a Tempe reservoir in the summer of 2020. Robinhood, the financial trading platform, rented out a floor in an office nearby. On a February morning, construction workers were putting the finishing touches on a 17-story Tempe office building expected to add 550 Amazon workers to the 5,000 already in the area.</p> <p>The frenetic activity in the Phoenix suburbs is one of the most visible signs of a nationwide recovery in commercial office real estate fueled by the tech industry, which has enjoyed unchecked growth and soaring profits as the pandemic has forced more people to shop, work and socialize online.</p> <p>Big tech companies like Meta and Google were among the first to allow some employees to work from home permanently, but they have simultaneously been spending billions of dollars expanding their office spaces. Doubling down on offices may seem counterintuitive to the many tech workers who continue to work remotely. In January, 48 percent of people in computer and math fields and 35 percent of those in architecture or engineering said they had worked from home at some point because of the pandemic, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.</p> <p>But companies, real estate analysts and workplace experts said several factors were propelling the trend, including a hiring boom, a race to attract and retain top talent and a sense that offices will play a key role in the future of work. In the last three quarters of 2021, the tech industry leased 76 percent more office space than it did a year earlier, according to the real estate company CBRE.</p> <p>"I think there are a lot more companies that are saying, 'You're coming back to work' — it's not 'if,' it's 'when,'" said Victor Coleman, the chief executive of Hudson Pacific Properties, a real estate investment group. "The reality is that most companies are currently working from home but are wanting and planning to come back to the office."</p>

Debates over whether workers should be required to return to the office can be thorny because some employees [say they have been happier](#) and more productive at home. One way companies are trying to lure them back is by splurging on prime office space with [great amenities](#).

Big Tech executives say that office expansions are to be expected and that modernized buildings will probably be spaces for people to collaborate rather than stare at screens. Meta, the parent company of Facebook, [leased 730,000 square feet](#) in Midtown Manhattan in August 2020, and has added space in Silicon Valley as well as in Austin, Texas; Boston; Chicago; and Bellevue, Wash.

“We will continue to grow and expect many people to return to our offices around the world once it’s safe,” said Tracy Clayton, a Meta spokesman.

Google said early last year that [it would spend \\$7 billion](#) on new and expanded offices and data centers around the country in 2021, including [\\$2.1 billion](#) to buy a Manhattan office building by the Hudson River, and growth in Atlanta; Silicon Valley; Boulder, Colo.; Durham, N.C.; and Pittsburgh. Google also said in January that it would spend [\\$1 billion](#) on a London office building.

Offices “remain an important part of supporting our hybrid approach to work in the future,” Google said in a statement.

During the pandemic, Microsoft has expanded in Houston; Miami; Atlanta; New York; Arlington, Va.; and Hillsboro, Ore. The company was growing to accommodate the many new employees it has hired over the last two years, said Jared Spataro, the vice president of modern work for Microsoft.

“The pandemic, I think, has just changed people’s perception of what’s possible in terms of geographic distribution,” Mr. Spataro said.

In April, Apple said it would build a campus near Raleigh, N.C., and has added space in San Diego and Silicon Valley. The company, which has [battled with its employees](#) over its plan for a majority of workers to return to offices most days each week, referred to its [April news release](#) about expansion but declined to comment further.

Salesforce, whose signature tower looms over the San Francisco skyline, is moving forward with four new office towers planned before the pandemic, in Tokyo, Dublin, Chicago and Sydney, Australia. The company said last February that many employees could be fully remote, but [shifted its messaging months later](#), saying that “something is missing” without office life and urging workers to come back in.

Salesforce’s thinking about the office has evolved, said Steve Brashear, the company’s senior vice president in charge of real estate. At the start of the pandemic, the feeling was that “being remote sounds so great and so safe,” Mr. Brashear said. Now, “the idea of being isolated as a remote worker has its drawbacks.”

The industry’s search for land has been so extensive that it has surged through longtime tech hubs like Silicon Valley and into areas not traditionally known for their tech scenes.

In Phoenix, for instance, tech leasing activity grew more than 300 percent from mid-2020 to mid-2021. New leases, subleases and renewals in the area totaled more than one million square feet from April through September last year, up from about 260,000 square feet a year earlier, according to CBRE.

Other locations not normally associated with tech also saw growth. In Vancouver, British Columbia, tech leasing activity doubled in growth in mid-2021, to 561,000 square feet from 268,000, as did activity in Charlotte, N.C., to 143,000 square feet from 71,000.

Amazon has been one of the most prolific in expansion, [announcing in 2020](#) that it would increase its white-collar work force in half a dozen cities. In Phoenix, its logo is ubiquitous, and it will occupy five floors in the new Tempe office building expected to be finished this year.

Holly Sullivan, Amazon's vice president of economic development, said adding to its regional hubs allowed the company "to tap into wider and more diverse talent pools, provide increased flexibility for current and future employees, and create more jobs and economic opportunity across the country." For developers, the focus on offices is good for business, and some interpret the growth as an indictment of the fully remote model.

The thinking on remote work is "like a pendulum — it swung a little bit too far, and now it's come back a little bit," said George Forristall, the Phoenix real estate director at Mortenson Development.

The flurry of expansions also highlights how much better tech has fared than other industries during the pandemic. In some cities, remote work and high vacancy rates continue to hurt restaurants and retailers.

Office vacancy rates in San Francisco climbed to 22.4 percent at the end of 2021 from 21.5 percent in the third quarter of the year, according to Jones Lang LaSalle, a real estate firm. The city's economists called tourism and office vacancies "special areas of concern in the city's economic outlook." In New York, office vacancy rates declined to 14.6 percent, according to JLL, but areas dependent on office workers to power local businesses, [like Midtown Manhattan, are recovering more slowly](#).

Smaller tech companies, given their financial constraints, might have to choose whether to invest in physical spaces or embrace a more flexible strategy. [Twitter](#) has continued to add offices in Silicon Valley, and video game developers like Electronic Arts and Epic Games have expanded in places like [Canada](#) and [North Carolina](#). But others have [cut back](#).

Zynga, a gaming company, offered up its 185,000-square-foot San Francisco headquarters for sublease last summer because it decided that shrinking its physical office and moving would make life easier for employees, said Ken Stuart, vice president of real estate at Zynga. Its new building in San Mateo, Calif., will be less than half the size.

"The reality is that people are frustrated by the commute and getting into the city, and also people feel like they can do better work by being hybrid," Mr. Stuart said.

By contrast, the largest tech giants "have so much money that it doesn't matter," said [Anne Helen Petersen](#), a co-author of "Out of Office," a recent book about the remote-work era. Because of their huge budgets, Ms. Petersen suggested, such companies can continue constructing offices without worrying about how much money they stand to lose if the buildings become obsolete.

"They're hedging their bets," Ms. Petersen said. "If the future's going to be fully distributed, 'we'll be setting up an apparatus for that.' If the future's going to rubber-band back to everyone back to the office, the way it was in 2020, 'we'll go back to that.'"

In Tempe, the two-floor WeWork co-working space at the Watermark, one of the premier office spaces, was buzzing with activity on a recent afternoon. Upstairs, Amazon has rented an entire floor.

Below, amid leafy plants and colorful lighting, employees at tech start-ups clacked away on MacBooks and sketched on whiteboards. Many said it had become more crowded in recent months, and more companies were renting the small office spaces within the WeWork.

Sam Jones, a co-founder of a nonfungible token start-up, Honey Haus, said his company had been renting a four-person space within WeWork for \$1,850 a month since October.

"I am just way less productive at home," Mr. Jones said. "People are definitely, I think, realizing that physical space just has something special to it."

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SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/a-10-drop-for-stocks-is-scary-but-its-not-that-rare/
GIST	<p>NEW YORK (AP) — The worries rocking Wall Street about interest rates, inflation and now Ukraine have sent the S&P 500 index — the most widely followed measure of the U.S. stock market — tumbling more than 10% from its record.</p> <p>It's a big enough fall that Wall Street has a name for it: a "correction." Such drops occur regularly, and market pros tend to see them as potentially healthy setbacks that can clear out unjustified market exuberance or excessive risk-taking.</p> <p>But they're frightening in the moment, particularly for every new generation of investors that gets into the market at a time when it seems like stocks only go up. The S&P 500 more than doubled between late March 2020 and early January, when it set its last all-time high.</p> <p>Taking a little froth out of the market is one thing. The larger fear, which always accompanies a correction, is that a correction could augur a "bear market," which is what Wall Street calls a drop of at least 20%.</p> <p>Here's a look at what history shows about past corrections, and what market watchers are expecting going forward.</p> <p>WHAT'S BEHIND THIS CORRECTION?</p> <p>Much of this drop is the result of fears about an abrupt shift to higher interest rates. After years of keeping interest rates super low, the Federal Reserve is set to start raising short-term rates to help corral the high inflation that's blazing across the global economy.</p> <p>Higher rates can keep a lid on prices by slowing the economy, but they can cause a recession if they get too high. They also often serve to suck money out of riskier areas of the market, including stocks. When interest rates are higher and safe investments like bonds are paying more in interest, investors are less willing to pay high prices for more speculative plays.</p> <p>The Fed has been buying trillions of dollars' worth of bonds through the pandemic, in order to keep longer-term rates low, an action Wall Street terms "printing money." Investors expect the Fed to throw this process into reverse, which would act much like additional rate increases.</p> <p>More recently, worries about tensions with Russia over Ukraine have accelerated the market's tumble. Beyond the human toll, a conflict in the region could send prices for oil and other energy commodities soaring and further stoke inflation.</p> <p>HOW OFTEN DO CORRECTIONS OCCUR?</p> <p>Every couple years, on average. Even during the historic, nearly 11-year-long bull run for U.S. stocks from March 2009 to February 2020, the S&P 500 stumbled to five corrections, according to CFRA. Worries about everything from interest rates to trade wars to a European debt crisis caused the pullbacks.</p> <p>In 2020, a correction did graduate to a bear market after the global economy suddenly shut down because of the pandemic. That sent the S&P 500 on a breathtaking drop of nearly 34% in about a month.</p> <p>This is the 24th time in the last 50 years that the S&P 500 has fallen at least 10%, including both bear markets and milder corrections.</p> <p>HOW QUICKLY DO THEY USUALLY HAPPEN?</p> <p>Not quite this fast. Looking only at corrections since World War II that didn't end up becoming bear markets, it took an average of 76 days for the S&P 500 to lose 10% from a recent high, according to CFRA. This time, it took 50 days.</p>

Of course, things could be worse. In February 2020, the S&P 500 tumbled more than 10% from a record in just over a week. That ended up being the start of the quickest bear market on record, as well as the shortest-lasting.

WHAT USUALLY HAPPENS AFTER A DROP LIKE THIS?

Looking only at corrections since 1946 that managed to right themselves before turning into a bear market, the S&P 500 has taken an average of 135 days to hit bottom and lost an average of 14% along the way, according to CFRA. The index has taken an average of 116 days to recoup its losses.

For declines that become bear markets, the damage is much worse. Going back to 1929, the average bear market has taken an average of nearly 20 months to hit bottom and caused a loss of roughly 39% for the S&P 500, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

HOW BAD CAN A BEAR MARKET BE?

On paper, an investor can lose most of their money. From late 1929 into the middle of 1932, the stock market fell a little more than 86%, for example.

A bear market can also feel interminable: One lasted more than five years, from 1937 into 1942, where U.S. stocks lost 60%, according to S&P Dow Jones Indices.

In Japan, the Nikkei 225 index is still trying to get back to the peak it set at the end of 1989. It remains roughly 30% below that level.

The Japanese example is an outlier, though. In almost every case, investors would have made back all their losses from a bear market for U.S. stocks if they simply held on and didn't sell. That includes the 2000 dot-com bust, the 2008 financial crisis and the 2020 coronavirus collapse.

HAVE RISING-RATE WORRIES CAUSED OTHER CORRECTIONS?

If the Fed does raise short-term rates next month, which investors see as a certainty, it would be the first such increase since 2018.

At that time, the S&P 500 sank nearly 20% amid worries the Fed was being too aggressive in raising rates and shrinking its balance sheet. The index avoided a full-blown bear market only after the Fed took a hard shift to say that it would be "patient" in its policies. It didn't raise rates again.

SHOULD WE EXPECT THE SAME THING TO HAPPEN AGAIN?

No one knows. Some investors on Wall Street say they expect the Fed to again loosen up before the stock market falls too sharply. But the Fed is facing much higher inflation this time around than in late 2018 and early 2019. The consumer price index leaped 7.5% in January from a year earlier, its hottest rate in four decades.

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HEADLINE	02/22 KCSO: 39 deputies fired; vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/king-county-deputies-covid-vaccine-mandate/281-465be184-0c79-499b-8d7f-1a45a91a5001
GIST	KING COUNTY, Wash. — Months after the deadline for King County's COVID-19 vaccine mandate, County Councilmember Reagan Dunn is raising the issue again when it comes to sheriff's deputies.

Dunn sent a letter Tuesday urging county leadership to make changes to the mandate for county employees after at least 39 deputies were fired over the mandate, with another 10 deputies awaiting accommodation rulings.

The now 39 vacant positions are among the 106 total available deputy positions at the King County Sheriff's Office, Dunn said.

The council member argues that with violent crime on a steep incline across the county, it is not time to force deputies to get vaccinated as a condition of their employment.

"We are currently in the midst of a public safety crisis and are desperate to hire more deputies as violent crime surges and communities across King County suffer under a shortage of law enforcement services," Dunn wrote in his letter to county Chief of Staff April Putney.

The prosecutor's office released a report last year showing an uptick in gun violence across the region for 2021, with incidents more than doubling compared to the four-year average from 2017-2020.

Dunn also argued that the majority of recent COVID cases have been in fully vaccinated and boosted individuals.

However, the [Public Health—Seattle & King County](#) says those not fully vaccinated are about three times more likely to catch the virus than boosted individuals and 24 times more likely to be hospitalized than boosted individuals.

"The goal of the employee vaccine mandate from the beginning has been to protect our workforce and our community," Chase Gallagher, a spokesperson for the King County Executive's office, wrote in a statement to KING 5. "Requiring vaccination means more employees are protected from these severe risks, and the most recent numbers have more than 94% of the Sheriff's Office employees following the vaccination mandate. COVID killed more than 450 police officers across the country in 2021, and we know the best way to prevent that number from increasing is with the safe, effective COVID vaccine."

Gallagher added that the sheriff's office is working to fill their vacancies as fast as possible, with recruitment bonuses of up to \$15,000 for lateral hires.

"Any employee who wishes to return to public service in King County may be able to do so provided they meet the requirements of employment, which is to provide proof of vaccination," Gallagher wrote.

Dunn said he hopes county leadership will up efforts to encourage voluntary vaccination and recognize that forceful vaccinations "ultimately cause more harm than good."

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HEADLINE	02/23 China: US 'creating panic' over Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-ukraine-china-says-us-biden-creating-panic-dismisses-sanctions-xi-jinping/
GIST	<p>Beijing — China on Wednesday accused the United States of "raising tensions" and "creating panic" over the Ukraine crisis, shortly after Washington announced new sanctions against Moscow and said it would continue to supply weapons to help bolster Ukraine's defenses against a potential Russian invasion.</p> <p>Beijing has trod a cautious line on Ukraine as Moscow has massed thousands of troops along the neighboring nation's borders. China criticized the West for imposing more sanctions after Russia ordered troops into two breakaway Ukrainian regions that Moscow now recognizes as independent.</p> <p>President Joe Biden earlier stressed that the penalties were only a "first tranche," adding that more sanctions would come if Russian President Vladimir Putin extended his country's military grip beyond the two territories in the eastern Donbas region.</p>

China and Russia have grown closer in recent years as they've become more estranged from the West, and more at odds with the U.S. Earlier this month, Putin traveled to Beijing and met with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping as the Russian leader massed forces around Ukraine's borders.

On Wednesday, China lashed out at Washington over the new sanctions against Russia and said it was raising tensions by sending weapons to Ukraine.

The U.S. actions were "raising tensions, creating panic, and even playing up the schedule of war," foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters.

"If someone is adding fuel to the fire while blaming others... then that behavior is irresponsible and immoral," she added, turning the spotlight on the United States in response to a question on China's role in resolving the situation.

She said China had "called on all parties to respect and attach importance to each other's legitimate security concerns, strive to resolve issues through negotiation and consultation, and jointly maintain regional peace and stability."

Asked if China would impose sanctions on Russia, Hua added that Beijing believes "sanctions have never been a fundamental and effective way to solve problems."

Apart from the United States, Britain, the European Union, Japan and Australia also announced penalties following Putin's announcement that he would send soldiers into Donetsk and Luhansk.

On Tuesday, President Biden said Washington would continue to supply "defensive" weapons to Ukraine against a Russian invasion, and deploy U.S. troops to reinforce NATO allies in Eastern Europe.

"Let me be clear, these are totally defensive moves on our part," Mr. Biden said in a televised speech at the White House.

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HEADLINE	02/22 WHO: new cases drop 3rd week, deaths dip
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-cases-fall-3rd-week-deaths-drop-83046362
GIST	<p>GENEVA -- The number of new coronavirus cases around the world fell 21% in the last week, marking the third consecutive week that COVID-19 cases have dropped, the World Health Organization said Tuesday.</p> <p>In the U.N. health agency's weekly pandemic report, WHO said there were more than 12 million new coronavirus infections last week. The number of new COVID-19 deaths fell 8% to about 67,000 worldwide, the first time that weekly deaths have fallen since early January.</p> <p>The Western Pacific was the only region that saw an increase in COVID-19 cases, with a 29% jump, while the number of infections elsewhere dropped significantly. The number of new deaths also rose in the Western Pacific and Africa while falling everywhere else. The highest number of new COVID-19 cases were seen in Russia, Germany, Brazil, the U.S. and South Korea.</p> <p>WHO said omicron remains the overwhelmingly dominant variant worldwide, accounting for more than 99% of sequences shared with the world's biggest virus database. It said delta was the only other variant of significance, which comprised fewer than 1% of shared sequences.</p> <p>WHO also reported that available vaccine evidence shows that "booster vaccination substantially improves (vaccine effectiveness)," against the omicron variant, but said more details are still needed on how long such protection lasts.</p>

The agency had previously said there was no proof that boosters were necessary for healthy people and pleaded with rich countries not to offer third doses to their people before sharing them with poorer countries.

Health officials have noted that omicron causes milder disease than previous COVID-19 variants and in countries with high vaccination rates, omicron has spread widely but COVID-19 hospitalization and death rates have not increased substantially.

Scientists, however, warn that it's still possible that more transmissible and deadly variants of COVID-19 could still emerge if the virus is allowed to spread uncontrolled.

WHO's Europe chief Dr. Hans Kluge says the region is now entering a "plausible endgame" for the virus and said there is now a "singular opportunity" for authorities to end the acute phase of the pandemic.

This week, Britain announced it would scrap all remaining COVID-19 restrictions, including the requirement for people with the illness to self-isolate, even as Prime Minister Boris Johnson acknowledged there could be future deadly variants of the virus. Earlier this month, Sweden abandoned wide-scale testing for COVID-19 even in people with symptoms, saying that testing costs and the expense of its pandemic restrictions were "no longer justifiable."

Hong Kong's leader, meanwhile, announced Tuesday that the city will test its entire population of 7.5 million people for COVID-19 three times in March as it grapples with its worst outbreak yet, driven by the highly contagious omicron variant.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Hong Kong mandatory testing all residents
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/hong-kong-orders-mandatory-covid-19-tests-residents-83037626
GIST	<p>HONG KONG -- Hong Kong will test its entire population of 7.5 million people for COVID-19 in March, the city's leader said Tuesday, as it grapples with its worst outbreak driven by the omicron variant.</p> <p>The population will be tested three times in March, Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam said.</p> <p>She said testing capacity will be boosted to 1 million a day or more.</p> <p>"Since we have a population of some 7 million people, testing will take about seven days," she said.</p> <p>Hong Kong has reported about 5,000 new daily infections since Feb. 15, with the cases threatening to overwhelm its healthcare system. Since the current surge began at the beginning of the year, the city has recorded nearly 54,000 cases and 145 deaths.</p> <p>The order for citywide testing comes after mainland Chinese authorities dispatched epidemiologists, health workers and other medical resources last week to help contain the outbreak in the semi-autonomous Chinese city.</p> <p>Hong Kong has largely aligned itself with mainland China's "zero-COVID-19" policy, which aims to totally stamp out outbreaks, even as many other countries are shifting their approach to living with the virus.</p> <p>Lockdowns of entire cities have been imposed in a number of areas of the mainland, but Lam said no such measure is currently being considered in Hong Kong because it is "not realistic."</p> <p>She also denied that the central Chinese government is giving instructions to Hong Kong on how to handle the epidemic.</p>

"I reiterate that the central government never issued any instructions on our anti-epidemic work," she said. "The central government will offer support as needed or upon our request, but of course we will always exchange our views."

The "zero-COVID-19" strategy means that Hong Kong authorities often take measures such as locking down residential estates for mass testing when positive cases are detected, imposing strict quarantine requirements on travelers and ordering the shuttering of businesses.

The rapid surge of infections in the city has threatened to overwhelm its healthcare system.

Health officials said last week that hospitals were already at 90% of capacity and isolation facilities were full. People who test positive for the virus in Hong Kong must either be admitted to a hospital or a quarantine facility.

Lam acknowledged on Tuesday that the city's isolation facilities are "severely inadequate" and that it is "working very hard with the full support of the central authorities" to build more.

Current social-distancing measures, such as a ban on dining at restaurants after 6 p.m. and the closure of businesses such as gyms and bars, will be extended until April 20.

"This is not good news to the sectors affected, but really at this stage of the pandemic we have no choice but to take these measures," Lam said.

She said the city hopes to boost its vaccination rate to 90% by early March.

Other measures announced Tuesday include ending the school year early and moving the normal July-August summer holidays forward to March and April so that schools can be turned into facilities for testing, isolation and vaccination.

Flight bans from countries classified as high risk, including Australia, Canada, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Britain and the U.S., will be extended to April 20.

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HEADLINE	02/23 UN: wildfires worsen, govts. unprepared
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/wildfires-worse-globally-governments-unprepared-83056008
GIST	<p>BILLINGS, Mont. -- A warming planet and changes to land use patterns mean more wildfires will scorch large parts of the globe in coming decades, causing spikes in unhealthy smoke pollution and other problems that governments are ill prepared to confront, according to a U.N. report being released Wednesday.</p> <p>The western U.S., northern Siberia, central India, and eastern Australia already are seeing more blazes, and the likelihood of catastrophic wildfires globally could increase more than 50% by the turn of the century, according to the report from the U.N. Environment Program.</p> <p>Areas once considered safe from major fires won't be immune, including the Arctic, which the report said was "very likely to experience a significant increase in burning."</p> <p>Tropical forests in Indonesia and the southern Amazon of South America also are likely to see increased wildfires, the report concluded.</p> <p>"Uncontrollable and devastating wildfires are becoming an expected part of the seasonal calendars in many parts of the world," said Andrew Sullivan, with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation in Australia, one of the report's authors.</p>

	<p>But U.N. researchers said many nations continue to spend too much time and money fighting fires and not enough trying to prevent them. Land use changes can make the fires worse, such as logging that leaves behind debris that can easily burn and forests that are intentionally ignited to clear land for farming, the report said.</p> <p>In the United States, officials recently unveiled a \$50 billion effort to reduce fire risks over the next decade by more aggressively thinning forests around “hot spots” where nature and neighborhoods collide. However, the administration of President Joe Biden has so far identified only a fraction of the funding called for in the plan.</p> <p>The U.N. researchers also called for more awareness of the dangers from smoke inhalation, which can affect tens of millions of people annually as plumes from major wildfires drift thousands of miles across international borders.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Key organizer Ottawa protest denied bail
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/key-organizer-ottawa-covid-protests-denied-bail-83041839
GIST	<p>OTTAWA, Ontario -- A judge on Tuesday denied bail to one of the leading organizers behind protests against COVID-19 restrictions and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.</p> <p>Ontario Court Justice Julie Bourgeois said she believed there was a substantial likelihood that Tamara Lich would reoffend if released.</p> <p>Another key leader, Patrick King, also was in court for a bail hearing, where a woman who acknowledged she only met him four weeks ago was offering half the value of her Alberta home to guarantee his bail.</p> <p>Lich was a key organizer of the protest that paralyzed the streets around Parliament Hill for more than three weeks. The trucker protest also grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts. They have since ended.</p> <p>Lich was arrested Thursday and charged with counselling to commit mischief and promised during a bail hearing on Saturday to give up her advocacy of the protest and return to Alberta.</p> <p>Ottawa protesters who vowed never to give up are largely gone, chased away by police in riot gear in what was the biggest police operation in the nation’s history.</p> <p>The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada’s reputation for civility, inspired convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands and interrupted trade, causing economic damage on both sides of the border. Hundreds of trucks eventually occupied the streets around Parliament, a display that was part protest and part carnival.</p> <p>For almost a week the busiest U.S.-Canada border crossing, the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor, Ontario and Detroit, was blocked. The crossing sees more than 25% of the trade between the two countries.</p> <p>Trudeau said people in Ottawa were harassed for weeks and said billions of dollars in trade were stalled by the border blockades, putting people’s jobs at risk.</p> <p>Lich previously belonged to the far-right Maverick Party, which calls for western Canada to become independent.</p> <p>A separate hearing was held for King, who was arrested Friday on charges of mischief, counselling to commit mischief, counselling to commit the offence of disobeying a court order and counselling to obstruct police. King has been known to promote racist conspiracy theories online.</p>

Alberta resident Kerry Komix was proposing to be a surety for King should he be granted bail. Under the plan, King would live at her home in a spare room.

Under cross-examination by the prosecution, Komix said she had known King for four weeks, having travelled to Ottawa herself as part of the trucker convoy.

Komix said she would ensure King followed any bail conditions and attended future court dates, or she would risk forfeiting a \$50,000 bond.

"As soon as he's released he will be in my 24-hour care," she said.

Komix said she was a light sleeper and had an attentive dog.

I don't see any way he can breach it without my knowledge," she said.

"I will be able to hear every move that he makes."

Just before a break in the proceedings, King was served with papers from the law firm of Paul Champ, which is spearheading a civil action against protest organizers on behalf of downtown Ottawa residents.

Lich's bail decision came the day after Canadian lawmakers voted to support the government's use of measures under the Emergencies Act.

Ottawa police have made 196 arrests, with 110 facing a variety of charges. Police also said 115 vehicles connected to the protest have been towed.

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HEADLINE	02/22 US, France: Russia mercenaries in CAR
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-france-attack-actions-russian-mercenaries-car-83055231
GIST	<p>UNITED NATIONS -- The U.S. and France criticized mercenaries in the Central African Republic from the Russian security company Wagner, accusing them on Tuesday of executing civilians, attacking U.N. peacekeepers and targeting predominantly Muslim communities in their military operations.</p> <p>Russia never mentioned mercenaries or Wagner in responding, but said that "Russian specialists" are working "successfully" in the African nation at the request of its government, including training the military.</p> <p>The exchange came at a U.N. Security Council meeting during which outgoing U.N. special representative Mankeur Ndiaye said that "the Central African people are still awaiting the dividends of peace."</p> <p>He also never mentioned Wagner, but he called on government authorities to take immediate and tangible measures to prevent human rights violations committed by defense and security forces "and other security personnel."</p> <p>The mineral-rich but impoverished Central African Republic has faced deadly intercommunal fighting since 2013, when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power and forced President Francois Bozize from office. Mostly Christian militias later fought back, also targeting civilians in the streets. Untold thousands were killed, and most of the capital's Muslims fled in fear.</p> <p>A peace deal between the government and 14 rebel groups was signed in February 2019, but violence erupted after the constitutional court rejected Bozize's candidacy to run for president in December 2020. President Faustin Archange Touadera won a second term with 53% of the vote, but he continues to face opposition from a rebel coalition linked to Bozize.</p>

Despite the declaration of an electoral cease-fire in October, Ndiaye said, “the security situation continues to be concerning.” He noted there are military operations under way against armed groups and the rebel coalition, and retaliation against national security forces and the civilian population as well.

He deplored violations of human rights and humanitarian rights that he said continue to be committed by all parties. He said that includes excessive use of force, the targeting of some communities, sexual abuse, and the recruitment and use of children by armed groups.

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that Central African Republic security forces and Wagner contractors — “referred to as ‘other security personnel’” in Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ latest report to the Security Council — “perpetrated over 40% of all violations documented” between October and February.

Both Thomas-Greenfield and French Ambassador Nicolas De Riviere singled out an attack in Aigbando on Jan. 16-17.

She said credible sources reported that Wagner forces in the town “massacred more than 30 unarmed civilians.” He said more than a dozen civilians were executed by Wagner’s mercenaries who then laid mines around the village to prevent the U.N. peacekeeping force from investigating.

“This is not an isolated incident,” De Riviere said. “This violence is systematic, it is deliberate, it is part of a method of provoking terror to control certain territories and make money from them.”

He said some of the government’s armed forces were also attacked by Wagner, and he called on authorities to prosecute all perpetrators of violence, “whoever they may be.”

Thomas-Greenfield said government forces “working with the Kremlin-supported Wagner Group perpetrated 17 violations” of the status of forces agreement between the government’s military and U.N. peacekeepers in the past four months. She said that was “totally unacceptable.”

She said the United States is also “deeply concerned” at reports that the armed forces and Wagner continue to target predominantly Muslim communities, which “poses grave risks to the country’s delicate social fabric, and it contributes to further destabilization.”

The United States urges the government to cooperate with the U.N. peacekeeping force and other partners to investigate all allegations and hold those responsible accountable, she said.

Russia’s deputy U.N. ambassador, Anna Evstigneeva, responded to the accusations, alluding to the crisis in Ukraine and Russia’s demand that NATO ban membership for Ukraine, which the alliance has rejected.

“In light of recent global events, including some developments in Africa, we are struck by the hypocrisy of some of our colleagues’ statements,” Evstigneeva told the council. “While underscoring sovereign right of states to choose partners and alliances, our Western colleagues may go hysterical if they do not like partners that a state has chosen, and cry that a sovereign state in question allegedly has no right to embark on such partnerships.”

She also accused council members of repeating “unverified information about alleged cases of human rights violations and crimes” in Central African Republic and asked why they didn’t demand investigations into U.S. airstrikes in Kabul in which dozens of people died.

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HEADLINE	02/22 New Jersey home drinking water lead pipes
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/jersey-notifies-186000-buildings-homes-drinking-water-lead/story?id=83040979

GIST	<p>New Jersey announced Thursday it is notifying nearly 200,000 homes and businesses that they are receiving drinking water from service lines contaminated with lead, according to the state Department of Environmental Protection.</p> <p>The announcement came on the heels of the state's Lead Service Line Replacement law, which was enacted in July 2021. The law calls for the replacement of these service lines by 2031.</p> <p>The 186,830 known lead service lines identified by the DEP feed into buildings all over the state, officials said.</p> <p>A map on the DEP's website allows residents to enter their addresses and see if they are affected.</p> <p>Service lines are the portion of a pipe that connect a water main to a building inlet and therefore could be serving multiple units within a property and could be serving both residential and commercial properties, according to the New Jersey DEP. Therefore, the total number of people affected is unknown.</p> <p>New Jersey alone has almost 3,500 drinking water systems, Shawn LaTourette, the state environmental commissioner, said Thursday.</p> <p>"There is no safe level of lead in drinking water or elsewhere," LaTourette said. "We have to eliminate it where we find it, period."</p> <p>"It poses a significant threat, particularly to our children" LaTourette added.</p> <p>Water systems were required by the new law to notify residents no later than Monday if their drinking water was coming from one of the identified lead service lines.</p> <p>Water systems submit inventories of the lead service lines in their service areas to the DEP, most recently in January.</p> <p>According to the DEP, homes and buildings constructed before 1988 must determine if interior lead solder or lead pipes are present.</p> <p>The DEP also said that those notified they have a lead service line need to replace it in full, from main to home.</p> <p>Until the lines are replaced, residents are encouraged to let the water run from the tap for about 15 to 30 seconds to flush out the lead.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Gas prices soar record levels Calif.
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/gas-prices-soar-record-levels-california-amid-ukraine/story?id=83045782
GIST	<p>Analysts are warning motorists in California to hold on to their wallets as a host of factors will take already record-high gas prices to new levels.</p> <p>The state averaged \$4.742 a gallon on Tuesday, about \$1.20 more than the national average, according to AAA. Some counties, including San Francisco, are averaging over \$4.90, according to AAA.</p> <p>Patrick De Haan, the head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy, which tracks gas prices across the nation, told ABC News that the statewide average is likely to cross the \$5 a gallon average threshold soon.</p> <p>"Everyone is going up the same but no one is going to match California's prices," he said.</p> <p>De Haan said there were several factors, the biggest being the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The political uncertainty over a possible invasion has affected oil prices globally, De Haan noted.</p>

"We are subject to international supply and demand," he said. "How long it progresses through the summer depends on Russia."

California's regulations have also affected prices, specifically its gas tax of 51.1 cents per gallon, according to De Haan. The tax, which pays for road repairs and maintenance throughout the state, is one of the largest in the nation, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators, and has gone up with inflation.

"The taxes make a huge difference in the overall price. That's why you haven't seen as big of a jump in Oregon or Washington," he said.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has proposed to halt a scheduled gas tax increase, but has not received support from Democratic members of the state legislature, the Associated Press reported.

De Haan said that spring is around the time that gas prices tend to go up and there is very little that motorists who drive in California can do to avoid taking a financial hit at the pump.

He did offer one suggestion that could help drivers cut down their trips to the gas station: slow down. De Haan said that a car's mileage grows when a driver maintains their speed as much as possible.

"Slowing down a couple of miles per hour [and] not racing light to light can easily save you 10 to 15% in every tank," De Haan said.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Winter storms wreaking havoc; cold blast
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/winter-storms-move-west-coast-east-coast-latest/story?id=83039925
GIST	<p>Two storms are wreaking havoc on roads as they push from the West Coast to the East Coast with heavy snow, ice and rain.</p> <p>As many as 98 vehicles crashed along a one-mile stretch of snowy Interstate 84 in Oregon on Monday, according to Oregon State Police. The largest crash involved between 15 and 20 cars and trucks, police said.</p> <p>Blowing snow also shut down roads in North Dakota.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the first storm will bring another 6 to 12 inches of snow to the upper Midwest and Great Lakes.</p> <p>Freezing rain is possible for the Midwest. An ice storm warning has been issued in Michigan, where flooding is ongoing as ice and snow melt. Minneapolis is under a winter storm warning.</p> <p>This first winter storm is also bringing snow and icy conditions to the Great Lakes region. Torrential rain battering parts of the Ohio and Tennessee River Valleys, bringing the threat of flash flooding.</p> <p>Behind this storm will be a blast of cold air. Wednesday morning the wind chill is forecast to plunge to -36 degrees in Fargo, North Dakota, and -17 in Minneapolis.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the second storm is moving through California and the Southwest Tuesday bringing low elevation snow to the Los Angeles and San Diego areas.</p> <p>In the Rockies, up to 20 inches of snow is possible. A winter storm warning is in effect in Aspen, Colorado.</p>

	<p>This second storm will then bring ice to Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas on Wednesday and Thursday. A winter weather advisory has been issued for Dallas.</p> <p>As this storm moves into the Northeast Thursday night into Friday, heavy snow, ice and rain are expected along the Interstate 95 corridor.</p> <p>New York City and areas to the south are expected to see rain and a wintry mix, while snow, ice and freezing rain are forecast for upstate New York and New England.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/23 Banks warn: imposter scams; phishing
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/banks-warn-customers-of-scam-draining-accounts-with-zelle-access-codes/
GIST	<p>Margie Morgan was recently scammed out of \$2,000 in a scheme involving Zelle digital payments and a woman who posed as a representative of Wells Fargo.</p> <p>Morgan, a food entrepreneur in Edina, Minnesota, fell victim to the scam because it was a new form of phishing, the practice of sending fraudulent communications that look real. It began as a text message to Morgan's phone that appeared to be from Wells Fargo, but ultimately wasn't.</p> <p>"I'm embarrassed at myself because I thought I was smarter than this," she said.</p> <p>The texts asked Morgan if she had authorized money transfers from her account. Morgan hit "no" and immediately received a call from a woman who portrayed herself as a Wells Fargo representative.</p> <p>Morgan said she didn't think much about it because she received legitimate phone calls from the bank and American Express in the past asking about fraudulent activity.</p> <p>The woman told Morgan that to recover the unauthorized transactions, Morgan would need to make reverse transfers to herself via Zelle. She followed the woman's directions, which involved using a PIN the scammer gave her. But the money flowed out of her account, not into it.</p> <p>Morgan, 57, learned later from an actual Wells Fargo representative that she'd been duped out of \$3,000. Wells Fargo was able to recover one \$1,000 transfer but not a second transfer for \$2,000, which had been processed, Morgan said.</p> <p>"I've been beside myself because I started a small business last year and \$2,000 cleaned me out," she said.</p> <p>Wells Fargo spokesman Kevin Friedlander said he couldn't discuss the specifics of Morgan's case, citing customer privacy and confidentiality.</p> <p>Zelle is an immediate form of payment and scammers who receive payments from victims typically withdraw the funds from the receiving financial institution immediately, making recovery difficult, Friedlander said.</p> <p>"We will continue to work with other financial institutions and law enforcement in an effort to track down suspects and attempt to recover funds for our customers," Friedlander said.</p> <p>On its website, Zelle draws a distinction between fraud and scams, saying a scam happens when a customer is "knowingly involved."</p>

“Even if you were tricked or persuaded into authorizing a payment for a good or service someone said they were going to provide, but they didn’t fulfill it, this would be considered a scam,” Zelle warns. As a result, it tells customers they may not be able to get their money back.

Wells Fargo told Morgan in writing that it asked the receiving financial institution to return her money. She said the bank added there was no guarantee that would happen.

Customers at other banks are reporting similar scams. And on its website, Wells Fargo describes how such “bank imposter” scams unfold. The scammer contacts a person pretending to be someone from a bank and they often know some personal information, likely from social media, public records or a data breach.

“Typically, they say that there is suspicious activity on your account and that to stop it you will need to provide an access code from a text or e-mail,” the Wells Fargo description said. “They may also ask for other information, such as a PIN or your username and password. Other times, you are told to send money to yourself to ‘reverse’ the payment.”

Friedlander noted that Wells Fargo will not contact customers and ask them to send money to themselves or anyone else to prevent or stop fraud on their account.

Wells Fargo warns customers not to share an access code, PIN or password with anyone who requests it. Wells Fargo said it only sends a code when prompted by an action a customer initiated, such as signing on to online banking or sending money.

Wells Fargo said it does not ask customers to send money to anyone, to “reverse a transfer,” “receive a refund” or anything similar.

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HEADLINE	02/22 UK alludes to retaliatory cyber attacks
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/uk-alludes-to-retaliatory-cyber-attacks-on-russia/
GIST	<p>The UK government alluded yesterday that it might launch offensive cyber operations against Russia if the Kremlin attacks UK computer systems after an invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>“The Defence Command Paper published last year set out plans to establish, and grow to a significant size, the National Cyber Force, the UK’s offensive cyber-capability that will complement our defensive capability,” Ben Wallace, UK Secretary of State for Defence, said yesterday in a meeting of the UK Parliament’s House of Commons.</p> <p>“That is a joint GCHQ and Defence agency that will be based in north-west England. It has already been established and is starting to grow,” he added.</p> <p>“I cannot comment on the operations that it will undertake, but I am a soldier, and I was always taught that the best part of defence is offence,” Wallace said.</p> <p>The UK official provided the comments to UK MP Jamie Stone, who said the UK should “expect a salvo of cyber-attacks” from Russian hackers if the UK sanctioned the Kremlin and asked Wallace what would the UK’s possible response to such attacks be.</p> <p>Wallace is considered the architect of the National Cyber Force, in which the UK government plans to invest £5 billion (\$6.8 billion) in the next few years.</p> <p>Back in October 2021, when the huge investment into the National Cyber Force was announced, the UK official said “it would be a dereliction of duty” if the UK didn’t have offensive cyber capabilities at its disposal.</p> <p>The new agency has not carried out any formal operations, but Wallace’s comments yesterday formally confirmed that the agency is now fully operational, although still in its early phases.</p>

HEADLINE	02/22 Supply chains focus of cybercriminals
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/hackers-tried-to-shatter-the-spine-of-global-supply-chains-in-2021/
GIST	<p>Cybercriminals have invested their efforts into breaking supply chains over the past year, with the manufacturing sector now becoming a top target.</p> <p>According to IBM's annual X-Force Threat Intelligence Index, based on security incidents and threat data gathered over 2021, businesses are now being "imprisoned" by the active exploitation of vulnerabilities and the deployment of ransomware.</p> <p>The tech giant's researchers say that phishing remains the most common attack vector for cyberattacks but there has also been a 33% increase in the use of vulnerabilities against unpatched systems. In total, vulnerability exploits are considered to be responsible for 44% of the reported, known ransomware attacks included in the report.</p> <p>Supply chain attacks can have severe ramifications: central service providers may be compromised to deploy poisoned software updates to their customer bases, ransomware may be executed to cause as much disruption to vendors as possible, ramping up the pressure to pay, or attacks may be triggered to deliberately wreak havoc in the real world, such as taking down utilities or core services in a target country.</p> <p>CrowdStrike's latest threat report says that ransomware attacks leading to data leaks increased from 1,474 in 2020 to 2,686 in 2021 and the most impacted sectors were technology, engineering, manufacturing, and the industrial sector.</p> <p>This appears to back up IBM's findings, which says that ransomware operators tried to "fracture" global supply chains by targeting manufacturing, bearing the brunt of 23% of overall attacks.</p> <p>"Attackers wagered on the ripple effect that disruption on manufacturing organizations would cause their downstream supply chains to pressure them into paying the ransom," IBM says.</p> <p>In total, 47% of cyberattacks against this industry were caused by the exploitation of vulnerabilities in unpatched software. Vulnerabilities disclosed in Industrial Control Systems (ICS) have risen by roughly 50% year-over-year, however, it should be noted that not all bugs are equal -- and the ones that matter generally relate to interrupted network visibility, remote hijacking, or damage.</p> <p>Reconnaissance is also on the rise. As an example, IBM reported a 2,204% increase in the intrusion of internet-connected SCADA Modbus Operational Technology (OT) devices during 2021.</p> <p>According to IBM, the pivot to manufacturing has "dethroned financial services and insurance after a long reign."</p> <p>Another interesting note in the report is the signs of an increasing focus on cloud environments. Docker is becoming a more common target for threat actors and in total, there has been a 146% increase in new Linux-based ransomware code.</p> <p>Charles Henderson, Head of IBM X-Force, says that 2021 trends reveal a cultural change from "chasing the money" to "chasing the leverage."</p> <p>"The attack surface is only growing larger, so instead of operating under the assumption that every vulnerability in their environment has been patched, businesses should operate under an assumption of compromise, and enhance their vulnerability management with a zero-trust strategy," Henderson commented.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Malware authors targeting rivals?
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/malware-authors-target-rivals-with-malicious-npm-packages/
GIST	<p>DevOps security firm JFrog has discovered malicious npm packages that appear to have been developed by malware authors to target rivals.</p> <p>On February 22, JFrog cybersecurity researchers Andrey Polkovnychenko and Shachar Menashe said that 25 malicious Node Package Manager (npm) packages had recently been detected by the firm's scanners, many of which are Discord token stealers.</p> <p>If an attacker is able to steal tokens, they can be used to infiltrate a victim's account and hijack Discord servers. They can also be valuable assets suitable for sale in underground, criminal markets.</p> <p>The team noted that many of the packages are masquerading as the colors.js npm package, open source software developed by Marak Squires. Colors.js, a package for implementing colored text on node.js, was sabotaged by its creator in January, thereby crashing tens of thousands of JavaScript programs in one strike.</p> <p>"This masquerading is probably due to the fact that colors.js is still one of the most installed packages in npm," JFrog says.</p> <p>In addition, other packages were found including Python remote code injectors and environmental variable stealers.</p> <p>While the reported packages were "quickly" removed by npm maintainers, one package, in particular, caught JFrog's eye. Called "Lemaaa," the npm package is a library "meant to be used by malicious threat actors to manipulate Discord accounts," according to the researchers.</p> <p>Lemaaa included utilities such as bot list functions, removing friends, password checks, grabbing backup codes, and also stealing billing information when a Discord token is supplied.</p> <p>The module itself is obfuscated, which shouldn't be a surprise considering its malicious purposes. However, after peeling apart Lemaaa's code, the researchers found that the package had been trojanized to hijack the secret Discord tokens supplied to the library and transfer them to Lemaaa's developer.</p> <p>As npm is used by millions of developers worldwide, malicious npm package detection is set to continue – and potentially rise over time.</p> <p>"We estimate this trend will only continue to increase, due to the fact that we are still seeing tens of new malicious packages that are flagged each day by our npm scanners," the researchers say.</p> <p>In December, JFrog uncovered 17 malicious npm packages also designed to steal Discord tokens. These packages were able to hijack account credentials, allowing attackers to take over a Discord server.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Ransomware victims pay up, crooks return
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/ransomware-victims-are-paying-up-but-the-crooks-are-coming-back-for-more/
GIST	<p>Many organisations that fall prey to ransomware attacks end up paying a ransom multiple times as cyber criminals exploit weaknesses in cybersecurity to squeeze their victims for as much cash as they can.</p> <p>According to analysis by cybersecurity researchers at Proofpoint, 58% of organisations infected with ransomware paid a ransom to cyber criminals for the decryption key – and in many cases, they paid up more than once.</p>

Law enforcement agencies and cybersecurity experts warn organisations against paying ransoms, because not only is there no guarantee that the supplied decryption key will work, giving in to ransom demands [just encourages more ransomware attacks](#) as it shows cyber criminals that the attacks work.

Of those who paid the ransom, just over half – 54% – regained access to data and systems after the first payment. But another third of ransomware victims ended up paying an additional ransom demand before they received the decryption key, while a further 10% also received additional ransom demands but refused the additional payment, walking away without their data.

In 4% of cases, organisations paid a ransom or ransoms but still couldn't retrieve their data, either because of a faulty decryption key, or because the cyber criminals simply took the money and ran.

When organisations fall victim to ransomware attacks, the crooks have often been inside that network for weeks or months prior to the attack. That means that even if the ransom is paid, the hackers have the necessary controls and permissions to return and trigger another attack.

"I don't think a lot of organisations are aware of the fact that you might pay the ransom once, but if the criminals have been in your infrastructure for eight weeks, you don't know what else they stole," Adenike Cosgrove, cybersecurity strategist at Proofpoint, told ZDNet.

Stolen data is [commonly used as additional leverage in ransomware attacks](#), as the cyber criminals threaten to publish it if they don't receive a ransom payment. While this does force some victims into paying, there's no guarantee that the cyber criminals won't return with additional threats to publish the stolen data later.

"The first run is 'give me a ransom so I can give you the decryption key'. The second ransom is 'give me a ransom or I'm going to put this data on the dark web'," Cosgrove explained.

"Third might be 'give me a ransom or I'm going to tell media publications about this data breach that you have and tell the regulators that, hey you didn't notify customers that their privacy was impacted,'" she added.

The best way to deal with ransomware attacks is to prevent them from happening in the first place.

According to Proofpoint, 75% of ransomware incidents [begin with phishing attacks](#), which cyber criminals use to steal usernames and passwords, or [plant remote access trojans](#) to gain an initial foothold in the network.

Being able to detect suspicious activity early on can, therefore, provide a means of preventing a full-scale ransomware attack.

"The assumption is that a ransomware attack is the beginning of an incident, but the reality is the incident started weeks ago," said Cosgrove.

Training users to identify and report suspicious emails can help organisations detect ransomware and other malware attacks early.

[Enabling two-factor authentication](#) can also provide a significant stumbling block to phishing attacks that aim to steal usernames and passwords, because without access to the authentication app, it's much harder for cyber criminals to leverage compromised login credentials.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Gaming, banking Trojans mobile malware
SOURCE	https://threatpost.com/gaming-banking-trojans-mobile-malware/178571/

The number of cyberattacks launched against mobile users was down last year, researchers have found — but don't pop the champagne just yet. The decline was offset by jacked-up, more sophisticated, more nimble mobile nastiness.

In a Monday [report](#), Kaspersky said that its researchers have observed a downward trend in the number of attacks on mobile users...However, "attacks are becoming more sophisticated in terms of both malware functionality and vectors," according to Kaspersky experts Tatyana Shiskova and Anton Kivva.

"In the reporting period, after a surge in H2 2020, cybercriminal activity gradually abated: There were no global newsbreaks or major campaigns, and the COVID-19 topic began to fade," according to Monday's report. "At the same time, new players continue to emerge on the cyberthreat market as malware becomes more sophisticated; thus, the fall in the overall number of attacks is 'compensated' by the greater impact of a successful attack. Most dangerous of all in this regard are [banking malware](#) and [spyware](#)."

The company's mobile products and technologies detected 97,661 new mobile banking trojans, along with 3,464,756 malicious installation packages and 17,372 new mobile ransomware trojans.

The number of malicious installation packages observed in 2021 actually dropped substantially, down 2,218,938 from 2020 and slightly down from the 3,503,952 packages discovered in 2019.

New Tricks for Mobile Banking Malware

Last year, banking trojans learned a number of new tricks. For example, the Fakecalls banker, which targets Korean mobile users, is now "[dropping] outgoing calls to the victim's bank and plays pre-recorded operator responses stored in the trojan's body," according to the report.

Other old dogs learning new tricks include the Sova banker, which steals [cookies](#), "enabling attackers to access the user's current session and personal mobile banking account without knowing the login credentials."

In 2021, cybercriminals also went after mobile gaming credentials — which are often sold later on the darknet or used to steal in-game goods from users. Last year, for example, marked the first time that researchers spotted what they called a "[Gamethief-type mobile trojan](#)," aimed at stealing account credentials for the mobile version of PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds (PUBG).

As well, the Vultur backdoor — found packed into a malicious, fully functional two-factor authentication (2FA) app discovered last month on Google Play — picked up the capability of using Virtual Network Computing (VNC) to snoop on targets by recording smartphone screens: "When the user opens an app that is of interest to attackers, they can monitor the on-screen events," researchers said.

Other trends spotted in 2021: fewer pandemic/COVID-19 topics used as bait, and more pop-culture lures, such as Squid Game. Kaspersky pointed to the [Joker trojan](#) on Google Play, which was found masquerading "as an app with a background wallpaper in the style of Squid Game."

Google Play Still Infested

Speaking of the malware-ridden Play Store, regardless of Google's attempts to scrub its app store clean, it's still a bit of a roach motel. ThreatFabric researchers recently sniffed out 300,000 banking trojan [infections](#) in Google Play during a four-month period.

Kaspersky also called out what it said were "repeat incidents of malicious code injection into popular apps through advertising SDKs," as in the "sensational" case of [CamScanner](#): a malicious app spotted in the Google Play store in August 2019 that tallied 100 million downloads.

Researchers noted that they also found [malicious code](#) inside ad libraries in [the official client](#) for the third-party marketplace known as APKpure, as well as in a [modified WhatsApp build](#).

One example was particularly alarming, from a security hygiene perspective: the malicious, fully functional 2FA app that hung out in Google Play for [more than two weeks](#), managing to cling to 10,000 downloads. It came loaded with the Vultur stealer malware that targets and swoops down on financial data.

Among all of last year's many banking-trojans moves, researchers found the resurgence of Joker especially notable. The [malware](#), which zaps victims with premium SMS charges, popped up yet again on Google Play, in a mobile app called Color Message, after which it snuck into more than a half-million downloads before the store collared it.

Kaspersky researchers also called out the [Facestealer](#) trojan: a family of Android trojans that uses social engineering to rip off victims' Facebook credentials.

These trojans most commonly sneak into Google Play by masquerading as a legitimate app, such as a photo editor or VPN service, to which they add a small code snippet to decrypt and launch their payload, the researchers explained. To confound analysis, such malware often uses a command-and-control (C2) server to send unpacking commands that get carried out in multiple steps: "Each decrypted module contains the address of the next one, plus instructions for decrypting it," they said.

Most of It's Still Adware

At 42 percent, adware was yet again the biggest slice of the mobile malware pie, even though it fell 14.83 percentage points over the prior year. In 2020, adware was also the No. 1 mobile menace, at 57 percent.

Next in prevalence were potentially unwanted riskware apps at 35 percent: a share increase of 14 percentage points, after a sharp decline in 2019–2020. As [defined](#) by Kaspersky, riskware are legitimate programs "that pose potential risks due to security vulnerability, software incompatibility or legal violations."

In third place were trojan threats at 9 percent: a share that rose by 4 percentage points year-over-year.

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HEADLINE	02/23 'Top tier' backdoor by Equation Group
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/chinese-experts-uncover-details-of.html
GIST	<p>Researchers from China's Pangu Lab have disclosed details of a "top-tier" backdoor put to use by the Equation Group, an advanced persistent threat (APT) with alleged ties to the cyber-warfare intelligence-gathering unit of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA).</p> <p>Dubbed "Bvp47" owing to numerous references to the string "Bvp" and the numerical value "0x47" used in the encryption algorithm, the backdoor was extracted from Linux systems "during an in-depth forensic investigation of a host in a key domestic department" in 2013.</p> <p>Pangu Lab codenamed the attacks involving the deployment of Bvp47 "Operation Telescreen," with the implant featuring an "advanced covert channel behavior based on TCP SYN packets, code obfuscation, system hiding, and self-destruction design."</p> <p>The Shadow Broker leaks</p> <p>Equation Group, dubbed the "crown creator of cyber espionage" by Russian security firm Kaspersky, is the name assigned to a sophisticated adversary that's been active since at least 2001 and has used previously undisclosed zero-day exploits to "infect victims, retrieve data and hide activity in an outstandingly professional way," some of which were later incorporated into Stuxnet.</p> <p>The attacks have targeted a variety of sectors in no less than 42 countries, including governments, telecom, aerospace, energy, nuclear research, oil and gas, military, nanotechnology, Islamic activists and scholars, media, transportation, financial institutions, and companies developing encryption technologies.</p>

The group is believed to be linked to the NSA's Tailored Access Operations ([TAO](#)) unit, while intrusion activities pertaining to a second collective dubbed [Longhorn](#) (aka The Lamberts) have been attributed to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Equation Group's malware toolset became public knowledge in 2016 when a group calling itself the [Shadow Brokers](#) leaked the entire tranche of exploits used by the elite hacking team, with Kaspersky uncovering [code-level similarities](#) between the stolen files and that of samples identified as used by the threat actor.

Bvp47 as a covert backdoor

The incident analyzed by Pangu Lab comprises two internally compromised servers, an email and an enterprise server named V1 and V2 respectively, and an external domain (dubbed A), sporting a novel two-way communication mechanism to exfiltrate sensitive data from the systems.

"There is abnormal communication between external host A and the V1 server," the researchers said. "Specifically, A first sends a [SYN packet](#) with a 264-byte payload to port 80 of the V1 server, and then the V1 server immediately initiates an external connection to the high-end port of the A machine and maintains a large amount of exchange data."

Simultaneously, V1 connects to V2 via the [SMB service](#) to perform a number of operations, including logging in to the latter with an administrator account, trying to open terminal services, enumerating directories, and executing PowerShell scripts through scheduled tasks.

V2, for its part, also connects to V1 to retrieve a PowerShell script and an encrypted second-stage payload, the encrypted execution results of which are sent back to V1, which, according to the researchers, "acts as a data transfer between the A machine and the V2 server."

The Bvp47 backdoor installed on the servers consists of two parts, a loader which is responsible for decoding and loading the actual payload into memory. "Bvp47 generally lives in the Linux operating system in the demilitarized zone that communicates with the Internet," the researchers said. "It mainly assumes the core control bridge communication role in the overall attack."

Links to the Equation Group

Pangu Lab's attribution to Equation Group stems from overlaps with exploits contained in a GPG-encrypted archive file published by the Shadow Brokers – "[eqgrp-auction-file.tar.xz.gpg](#)" – as part of a [failed auction](#) of the cyber weapons in August 2016.

"In the process of analyzing the 'eqgrp-auction-file.tar.xz.gpg' file, it was found that Bvp47 and the attacking tools in the compressed package were technically deterministic, mainly including 'dewdrops,' 'suctionchar_agents,' 'tipoffs,' 'StoicSurgeon,' 'incision' and other directories," the researchers explained.

"The 'tipoffs' directory contains the [RSA asymmetric algorithm](#) private key used in the Bvp47 covert channel [for] command execution and other operations. On this basis, it can be confirmed that Bvp47 is from [the] Equation group."

The findings mark the second time hitherto undocumented malware developed by the Equation Group has come to light in as many months. In late December 2021, Check Point Research disclosed details of a diagnostic utility called "[DoubleFeature](#)" that's used in conjunction with the DanderSpritz malware framework.

"Judging from the attack tools related to the organization, including Bvp47, Equation group is indeed a first-class hacking group," the researchers concluded.

"The tool is well-designed, powerful, and widely adapted. Its network attack capability equipped by Oday vulnerabilities was unstoppable, and its data acquisition under covert control was with little effort. The Equation Group is in a dominant position in national-level cyberspace confrontation."

HEADLINE	02/23 Report: new threat groups targeting ICS
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/analysis/apt/dragos-finds-three-new-ics-threat-groups-one-primed-to-disrupt-energy-targets
GIST	<p>Dragos detailed three new threat groups targeting industrial control systems in its annual report, including one technologically adept group that seems to be scouting out potential disruptive attacks in the energy sector.</p> <p>Not all ICS groups intend to sabotage active systems. Several are looking to steal intellectual property. Of the ones that do, many are not yet entirely capable of performing that attack. Dragos categorizes them by the ICS kill chain, developed in part by its founder Rob Lee, separating groups into those trying to breach ICS systems but not yet able to do so; those able to do so but either not intending or not quite yet prepared to perform a disruptive attack; and the rarer few entirely prepared to do that attack.</p> <p>Kostovite, an energy-sector-focused group among the three new groups detailed by Dragos, appears to fall into the second category: a group able to breach ICS systems but not yet ready to pull the trigger on disrupting the energy sector.</p> <p>"We don't know the intent of the adversary — we can't reach back out to them and ask them what they were trying to do — but based on our analysis, and based on what we found, everything points to the fact that they were getting access for long-term access for future disruptive actions," said Lee in a meeting with reporters.</p> <p>Kostovite targeted a "major" operation and maintenance (O&M) firm for the renewable energy sector, and leveraged its access to multiple companies' OT networks in the United States and Australia.</p> <p>The group appears consistent with actors profiled by Mandiant in April who targeted Ivanti Pulse Secure VPN devices, targeting government agencies and the defense industrial base. Mandiant reported the attackers likely came from several groups supporting Chinese espionage. After the Mandiant report, CISA issued an alert to government agencies and critical infrastructure.</p> <p>"The systems that they were embedding themselves into and getting access to, were there for the purpose of control and monitoring those generation assets. And there wasn't anything that they were taking or getting that really would have been valuable for intellectual property," said Lee.</p> <p>Lee said that Dragos came across Kostovite during an incident response case and was able to mitigate the group before any damaging attack came to fruition. But the group, he said, showed alarming stealthiness during their breaches, capable of using native ICS functionality rather than malware to achieve its ends.</p> <p>Other new groups cataloged in the report include Petrovite, a burgeoning group targeting central Asian manufacturing and energy, that appears to use the Zebrocy malware associated with Russian intelligence, and Erythrite, a group with wide targeting of United States and European networks with some technological overlap to known data-stealing group SolarMaker first profiled by Morphisec.</p> <p>Though Dragos does not confirm that the two groups are the same, Erythrite uses the same SEO poisoning and malicious PDF files as SolarMaker, and Dragos says its Erythrite findings are consistent with other reports of SolarMaker infecting 96 Fortune 500 companies. SolarMaker appears to be operated by a Russian-speaking actor, per the Morphisec report, and is seen widely in the IT space in addition to OT.</p> <p>Dragos' report also makes an interesting note about the common vulnerability scoring system (CVSS) grading over the past year: 38% of common vulnerabilities and exposures (CVEs) reviewed by the company contained errors in computing the CVSS threat score.</p>

	"Asset owners should take this into account when making patching and mitigation decisions for their networks," said the report.
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HEADLINE	02/22 Lawsuit: Sea Mar Health negligent in breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/sea-mar-negligence-data-breach/
GIST	<p>A Seattle-based healthcare provider is facing a class action lawsuit over a cyber-attack in which the protected health information of 688,000 people was exposed.</p> <p>The exfiltration of data from Sea Mar Community Health Centers became apparent when files stolen in the attack showed up on the dark data leak website of cyber-criminal gang Marketo.</p> <p>Marketo claimed to have stolen 3TB of data from Sea Mar. Databreaches.net spotted the leaked files in June 2021 and reported them to Sea Mar. The healthcare provider waited until October 2021 to notify impacted individuals via letter.</p> <p>Sea Mar said hackers had gained access to its network between December 2020 and March 2021. The cyber-criminals exploited that access to exfiltrate sensitive data, including names, dates of birth, health information, addresses and Social Security numbers.</p> <p>In October 2021, the incident was reported to the HHS' Office for Civil Rights as a data breach impacting 688,000 current and former patients.</p> <p>On February 16, Alan Hall, from Bellingham, Washington, filed a lawsuit against Sear Mar on behalf of himself and others impacted by the data breach. In it, the plaintiff accused the healthcare provider of negligence and alleged that Sea Mar failed to implement adequate and reasonable cybersecurity procedures and protocols to protect patient and employee information.</p> <p>Sea Mar is further accused of caring for sensitive patient data "in a reckless manner."</p> <p>Hall alleges that Sea Mar knew that its computer systems and security practices were inadequate but failed to disclose this information. He further accuses Sea Mar of improper monitoring of its network for intrusions.</p> <p>The suit alleges that "as a result of the Data Breach, Plaintiff and more than 650,000 Class Members suffered injury and ascertainable losses in the form of the present and imminent threat of fraud and identity theft, loss of the benefit of their bargain, out-of-pocket expenses and the value of their time reasonably incurred to remedy or mitigate the effects of the attack, and the loss of value of their personal information."</p> <p>Hall is seeking compensatory damages, nominal damages, reimbursement of out-of-pocket costs and injunctive relief, including improvements to Sea Mar's data security systems and future annual audits.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/23 Ukraine police bust prolific phishing gang
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/ukrainian-cops-bust-phishing/
GIST	<p>Ukrainian police have arrested a phishing gang that allegedly tricked tens of thousands of victims into handing over their credit card details on spoofed sites.</p> <p>The five individuals reportedly made over five million hryvnias (\$172,600) from their scheme, which involved faking mobile operator websites.</p> <p>The plot's ringleader purportedly designed over 40 phishing pages, mimicking sites where users typically top-up their mobile phone balance. They used these card details to drain the bank accounts of over 70,000 victims, the police claimed.</p>

Rather than phishing emails, the group is said to have used paid online marketing and social media advertising to reach their targets.

They hosted the phishing sites on their own infrastructure, managed by one group member. Three others were tasked with fraudulently transferring funds out of the victims' bank accounts, receiving a percentage of the profits in return.

Police searched the suspects' homes, seizing computer equipment, mobile phones, flash drives, bank cards and over two million hryvnias (\$69,000) in cash.

They face up to eight years behind bars for the alleged plot.

Phishing remains a favorite tactic of fraudsters and cyber-criminals. [Data from Proofpoint](#) out this week claimed that 91% of UK organizations were successfully compromised by a phishing email last year.

Such emails can contain malicious attachments and links, designed to install malware or trick the user into handing over their details. More subtle attempts include business email compromise (BEC), which typically relies on social engineering to obtain money from victim organizations.

Over three-quarters (78%) of organizations globally were targeted by email-based ransomware attacks in 2021 and 77% faced BEC, Proofpoint claimed.

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HEADLINE	02/23 EU cyber response unit to Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/eu-cyber-response-unit-ukraine/
GIST	<p>The EU is deploying a newly formed Cyber Rapid-Response Team (CRRT) to Ukraine to help the country combat Russian threat actors as troops start pouring over the border.</p> <p>The Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence tweeted the news yesterday, revealing that the move came at the request of the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>Lithuania will be leading the coalition of six EU countries – which also includes Croatia, Poland, Estonia, Romania and the Netherlands – in order “to help Ukrainian institutions to cope with growing cyber-threats.”</p> <p>A CRRT official told the BBC that the team of eight to 12 experts would be “composed of different cyber-expertise, such as incident response, forensics, vulnerability assessment, to be able to react to a variety of scenarios.”</p> <p>It comes after a series of attacks on Ukrainian institutions traced back to Russia over the past few weeks, as it amassed an estimated 190,000 troops on the country's border.</p> <p>These began with a massive web defacement campaign in which Ukrainian government sites were replaced with Russian propaganda messages. Then came a “WhisperGate” destructive malware campaign targeting government, IT and non-profit organizations across Ukraine.</p> <p>Microsoft warned that the campaign shared characteristics with the infamous NotPetya malware, which was also designed to look like financially motivated ransomware.</p> <p>Last week, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry website and the networks of state-owned banks were DDoS-ed by threat actors later traced by UK and US officials to Russian intelligence (GRU).</p> <p>“We can see that cyber-measures are an important part of Russia's hybrid toolkit,” a CRRT official told the BBC.</p>

	Ukrainian officials have also warned of Russian disinformation efforts , dismantling a bot farm running 18,000 mobile accounts. These were used to make anonymous bomb threats and spread fake stories alleging mines had been laid in public spaces, it claimed.
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HEADLINE	02/22 News Corp software supply chain attack
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/news-corps-software-supply-chain-attack/
GIST	<p>Journalists from News Corp have been targeted in a recent series of cyberattacks, which underscores the need to ensure adequate protection for organizations' SaaS services. In this particular incident, the attackers were able to access News Corp's systems since February 2020 or earlier.</p> <p>It is reported that the hackers have had access to emails, documents on Google Docs, as well as article drafts.</p> <p>Being a publicly-traded company, News Corp had to disclose this information in an SEC filing in early February, where it shared general information about the security breach. In summary, as described in the filing, the company discovered that one of the cloud service providers it utilized had been the target of persistent cyberattacks.</p> <p>Said cloud service providers are used to support the company's various business operations and are thus considered upstream suppliers – hence the cyberattack being described as a supply chain attack.</p> <p>A compromised cloud security posture The attack on the media conglomerate underscores the need for extended security posture management, especially with the potential of News Corp did not specify what particular cloud services were compromised and how the attackers were able to gain access to these SaaS services.</p> <p>However, the news organization's security advisors believe that it was a state-sponsored attack—that the hack was most likely intended to gather intelligence for the benefit of the Chinese government. Analysis points to data allegedly being collected by the attackers.</p> <p>According to its security consultants, the hackers were “likely involved in espionage activities to collect intelligence to benefit China's interests.” This was rebuffed by Chinese embassy officials in the United States, wherein a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy sought a “professional, responsible, and evidence-based approach to cyber-related incidents, rather than making allegations based on speculations.”</p> <p>This is not the only time that a media company had been targeted by a major cyberattack. In 2013, the New York Times also reported a breach that affected 53 personal computers belonging to employees. That particular attack coincided with a journalistic investigation into wealth accumulated by relatives of then-prime minister Wen Jiabao.</p> <p>State-sponsored attacks have likewise reportedly been targeting other media organizations, including the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal (also owned by News Corp), and Bloomberg, among others.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 World watches: China to regulate AI
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/china-regulate-ai-world-watching/
GIST	<p>WEN LI, A Shanghai marketer in the hospitality industry, first suspected that an algorithm was messing with her when she and a friend used the same ride-hailing app one evening.</p> <p>Wen's friend, who less frequently ordered rides in luxury cars, saw a lower price for the same ride. Wen blamed the company's algorithms, saying they wanted to squeeze more money from her.</p> <p>Chinese ride-hailing companies say prices vary because of fluctuations in traffic. But some studies and news reports claim the apps may offer different prices based on factors including ride history</p>

and the phone a person is using. “I mean, come on—just admit you are an internet company and this is what you do to make extra profit,” Wen says.

On March 1, China will outlaw this kind of algorithmic discrimination as part of what may be the world’s most ambitious effort to regulate [artificial intelligence](#). Under the rules, companies will be prohibited from using personal information to offer users different prices for a product or service.

The sweeping rules cover algorithms that set prices, control search results, recommend videos, and filter content. They will impose new curbs on major ride-hailing, [ecommerce](#), [streaming](#), and [social media](#) companies.

The regulations will extend an extraordinary crackdown on China’s most popular and most valuable tech companies, which has included big fines and sidetracked stock offerings. “Some unhealthy and disorderly signals and trends have occurred in the rapid development of our country’s digital economy,” President Xi Jinping said [in a speech in October](#), according to a translation by the newsletter Pekingology.

Policymakers elsewhere are taking note. “I was just this morning in a meeting with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and I got asked if China is doing things we are not,” says [Rogier Creemers](#), an expert on Chinese law and governance at Leiden University in the Netherlands. “They are moving extremely fast.”

The regulations, known as the [Internet Information Service Algorithmic Recommendation Management Provisions](#), were drafted by the [Cyberspace Administration of China](#), a powerful body that enforces cybersecurity, internet censorship, and ecommerce rules. Among other things, they prohibit fake accounts, manipulating traffic numbers, and promoting addictive content. They also provide protections for delivery workers, ride-hail drivers, and other gig workers.

Some provisions aim to address complaints about online services. Under the rules, for instance, companies will be prohibited from using personal characteristics to offer users different prices for a product; they also will be required to notify users, and allow them to opt out, when algorithms are used to make recommendations.

Companies that violate the rules could face fines, be barred from enrolling new users, have their business licenses pulled, or see their websites or apps shut down.

Some elements of the new regulations may [prove difficult](#) or impossible to enforce. It can be technically challenging to police the behavior of an algorithm that is continually changing due to new input, for instance.

But the Chinese public seems largely supportive of measures aimed at curbing the power of the big tech platforms, whose services they use every day. Lillian Li, founder of the Chinese tech publication [Chinese Characteristics](#), compares public sentiment about the tech companies to the ambivalence of Westerners toward Facebook or Google, which offer great convenience at the cost of a user’s personal data.

And the past 18 months have shown that Chinese regulators are not shy about punishing prominent companies. The Didi ride-hailing app was pulled from Chinese app stores soon after its American IPO due to government concerns about its data practices. Ecommerce giant [Alibaba](#) has been forced to pay millions in fines over antitrust violations.

Other elements of the regulations are hazy or open to interpretation, for example provisions that order companies to “uphold mainstream value orientations,” “vigorously disseminate positive energy,” and “prevent or reduce controversies or disputes,” according to [a translation](#) by Stanford’s DigiChina project.

Another section of the proposal requires Chinese companies to avoid policies that lead users to “addiction or excessive consumption.” Similar concerns led to last year’s [crackdown on celebrity culture](#), and [strict limits](#) on how much time minors can spend playing video games.

Even before the rules take effect, Chinese companies are making changes. ByteDance, the Beijing-based company behind the popular short-video app Douyin, in October began showing [five-second videos](#) urging users to log off after they've watched for a long time. The move was designed to curb addiction to the algorithmically curated feed. The company has also introduced features to Douyin and other apps that let users opt out of having personal information fed into recommendation algorithms. An [investigation by one Chinese media outlet](#) found that 26 out of 28 popular apps introduced ways for users to opt out of personalized recommendations last year, in response to [another law](#) concerning the protection of private data.

Chinese tech firms already closely monitor content to comply with rules around sharing information that the government deems harmful. Earlier this month, the social media platform Weibo [removed 71,000 posts](#) attacking Olympic athletes—including American-born figure skater Zhu Yi, who competes for China. [Tencent](#) Video posted a version of the 1999 movie *Fight Club* with an ending altered by the Chinese distributor (the original was [quickly reinstated](#)). And scenes depicting [LGBT themes in *Friends*](#), a sitcom that is wildly popular with Chinese viewers, have reportedly been excised or altered on Chinese streaming platforms.

A separate, but related, [proposal](#) aims to address “synthetic content,” an umbrella term encompassing fake news, synthetic audio, and [deepfake](#) images and videos, in which a person's face is stitched onto someone else using AI. Among the provisions, makers of deepfake software would be required to verify the real names of creators and “conspicuously label” any deepfaked content. Deepfake apps, popular in China, [have stirred public debate](#) over privacy and ownership of personal data.

China's AI rules are not the world's first. The European Union has [proposed regulations](#) that would restrict use of facial recognition, prohibit algorithmic manipulation, and regulate AI-enabled products like chatbots and computer games. But the EU rules, drafted in April 2021, could be debated for several more years if previous regulations are any guide.

[Silvia De Conca](#), a legal scholar at Vrije University in the Netherlands, says there are parallels between China's regulations and the proposed EU legislation—particularly a focus on informing users and letting them opt out of targeting. But, she says, European lawmakers tend to think in terms of fostering markets and individuals' rights; in China, by contrast, there's an emphasis on societal wellbeing. Authorities “see these issues as collective issues,” she says, pointing to rules that address morality and “mainstream values.”

The Chinese regulations are far more ambitious than anything being considered on a national level in the US, which has generally taken a hands-off approach to AI. Police use of facial recognition is [restricted only in certain cities](#). An [Algorithmic Accountability Act](#), proposed in the US Senate, aims to control algorithms [that discriminate by gender or race](#), but has not progressed beyond legislative hearings. Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota) and Cynthia Lummis (R-Wyoming) recently [introduced legislation](#) that would require platforms to implement tools to “to reduce addiction and the amplification of harmful content.” Even if such bills were to pass, however, they likely would face legal challenges from technology companies.

“The US is woefully behind in this space, and it might need to take a better degree of leadership, and help set the norms for how the technology can be used,” says [Russell Wald](#), director of policy for Stanford's Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence.

Wald argues that China is well-placed to influence other countries because it will have both the first working policies and home-grown companies with wide reach. He notes that the rules will not apply to the government's use of algorithms or data, and he says that some new rules, such as those promoting particular values, are about maintaining government control. “We are talking about regulation that's geared towards benefiting the regime,” he says.

Efforts to regulate tricky new technologies in one country or region have sometimes had a discernible impact elsewhere. The EU's [General Data Protection Regulation](#), which took effect in 2018 and restricts

	<p>companies' use of private data, has influenced company policies worldwide, and legislation elsewhere, including in California.</p> <p>Bipartisan hostility toward China means US lawmakers are unlikely to cite Chinese regulations as inspiration. But Beijing's maneuvers could perhaps have a subtle effect. In the UK, some lawmakers have called for online companies to shield young people from harmful content in an approach that some have likened to China's proposals.</p> <p>"These ideas could ripple out," says Matt Sheehan, a fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace who researches China's AI ecosystem. "What's interesting in China is that they're going to be able to run experiments at a very large scale on what it actually means to implement these ideas."</p> <p>Other countries, including Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan, are exploring strategies to manage AI. China's new regulations are likely to be most influential in countries that already have strong ties to China; one recent academic analysis finds the reach of Chinese tech companies has helped shape policies in countries such as Pakistan. Proposed regulations in Pakistan could give the government a greater hand in deciding what sort of online content is appropriate.</p> <p>"What we've done with the digital realm [in the West] is to abdicate the sense that the government has a role to play," says Creemers, the Dutch student of Chinese law. "It's really interesting China is going after its own. In a way one has to admire that."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Impact: cars, devices 3G network shuttered
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/3g-networks-are-shutting-down-and-that-could-be-bad-news-for-your-car-4g-5g-att-wireless-networks-shut-t-mobile-verizon-phones-tablets-home-alarms-medical-devices-fall-detectors-honda-automatic-crash-notification-911-vehicle-truck-boat-cell
GIST	<p>AUSTIN, Texas (KEYE) — Starting Tuesday, AT&T will shut down its 3G wireless network. Other carriers like T-Mobile and Verizon will follow suit later this year.</p> <p>The shutdown will impact older phones, tablets, home alarm systems and medical devices, such as fall detectors. Some cars could also lose key features that require connectivity including remote locks, navigation systems and automatic crash notifications.</p> <p>"3G is being phased out and it's being replaced by upgraded 4G and also 5G," said Billy Perkins, a diagnostic master technician at First Texas Honda in Austin.</p> <p>Perkins says depending on the Honda model and year it was manufactured a free software upgrade is needed before AT&T shuts down its 3G network on Feb. 22.</p> <p>Without it, Honda owners will have to buy new hardware if they want to continue using their phones to remotely start their vehicles and lock and unlock doors.</p> <p>"You'll still have those people who will come in after that deadline and they're going to have to buy a unit," said Perkins. "The only solution they have for you is to replace that cellular device, that control unit in that car, and that's going to be a customer expense. Honda is not going to cover that," said Perkins.</p> <p>On Tuesday, AT&T began to deactivate 3G cell towers and install faster and more reliable 4G and 5G equipment. That means a wide variety of makes and models that use 3G, such as Honda, Toyota, Nissan, Subaru, Audi, BMW, Hyundai and Porsche won't be able to use connected features unless software or hardware upgrades are installed.</p> <p><i>This could impact vehicles starting as early as 2009, 2010 all the way up to 2021," said Alex Knizek, an automotive engineer with Consumer Reports.</i></p>

	<p>Knizek thinks the most important feature drivers could lose is automatic crash notification. It automatically calls 911 or an emergency contact if a driver gets in a wreck.</p> <p>“If your car is relying on 3G, that feature may not work and that’s a huge loss,” said Knizek.</p> <p>Some cars will also lose the ability to update locations and traffic data while navigating. Consumer Reports says several automakers don’t yet have a solution that will allow them to future-proof their vehicles.</p> <p>“Toyota is a big one that comes to mind and Lexus, Nissan, Infiniti. At least at this time, they haven’t announced any plan or service for customers to upgrade their vehicles to keep that technology going. So, unfortunately, those owners might just be out of luck,” said Knizek.</p> <p>Here's a list of makes and models that are impacted by the 3G shutdown.</p> <p>Some of the systems will stop working as soon as Feb. 22. Others will need a connectivity upgrade, if it's available, later this year. According to the Federal Communications Commission, T-Mobile's 3G UMTS network will disappear by July 1. Verizon announced that it will finish shutting down its 3G network by Dec. 31.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Cryptocurrency prices plunge
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cryptocurrency-bitcoin-ether-russia-ukraine-investors/
GIST	<p>The price of major cryptocurrencies is slumping as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalates.</p> <p>Bitcoin fell to \$36,370 on Tuesday after being as high as \$44,125 a week ago, while other popular digital coins, including ethereum, pipple and solana, have also tumbled recently.</p> <p>Analysts said the declines show that cryptocurrencies are a poor choice for investors seeking stability in periods of market turmoil, in contrast to traditional hedges against risk like gold and U.S. Treasury securities.</p> <p>"Bitcoin's safe haven narrative has almost completely fallen apart as the rising possibility of military conflict and the worsening U.S.-Russia relationship puts the wider financial market in risk-aversion mode," Yuya Hasegawa, a crypto market analyst for Bitbank in Japan, said in a research note.</p> <p>Stocks fell on Wall Street Tuesday as investors sought refuge from the turbulence caused by the conflict in Ukraine. The price of gold rose to \$1,907 an ounce on Tuesday, its high for the year. Investors are also flocking into U.S. government bonds, driving up Treasury prices while pushing down their yields, which move in opposite directions.</p> <p>"Bitcoin is the ultimate risky asset, and a Ukraine invasion would keep crypto selling pressure going another 10 percent to 15 percent over the short-term," Edward Moya, senior market analyst at Oanda, said in a recent report.</p> <p>President Biden on Tuesday afternoon announced new sanctions against Russia as a result of what he called a "Russian invasion of Ukraine," a response to Russia President Vladimir Putin's move to send forces into Ukraine's eastern breakaway regions. Mr. Biden said the sanctions, closely coordinated with allies and partners, will target two large banks in Russia and its sovereign debt.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Tonga’s internet finally restored
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/tongas-internet-finally-restored-weeks-big-eruption-83050529
GIST	WELLINGTON, New Zealand -- Tonga's main internet connection to the rest of the world has finally been restored more than five weeks after a huge volcanic eruption and tsunami severed a crucial undersea cable.

Three people in Tonga were killed by the Jan. 15 tsunami, dozens of homes were destroyed and drinking water was tainted.

The fiber-optic cable is now fully operational again after being reconnected Tuesday, said Samiuela Fonua, the chairperson at Tonga Cable Ltd., the state-owned company that owns the cable.

“It’s a huge relief when you know things have come to the end and are working well,” Fonua told The Associated Press. “It’s one step forward for the country.”

Fonua said the crew aboard a repair ship replaced about 90 kilometers (56 miles) of cable that had been damaged by the tsunami. His company didn’t have enough spare cable, Fonua added, and needed to borrow some from other companies.

The fix means that Tonga Cable can now focus on repairing a second severed cable that connects some of the outer islands to the main island, Fonua said. That cable runs close to the undersea volcano.

Fonua said that entrepreneur Elon Musk’s SpaceX company had also been helping restore connections through its network of low-orbit satellites called Starlink.

Fonua said his company had been testing the satellite connections this week and they had been working well. He said that now the main cable was restored, he hoped the SpaceX connections could be used for reconnecting people on some of the outer islands.

Officials in neighboring Fiji said SpaceX had established a station there to help restore connections in Tonga.

Tonga has also been grappling with its first outbreak of the coronavirus, which may have been brought in by foreign military crews aboard ships and planes delivering vital aid after the eruption.

The outbreak has grown to more than 250 cases but so far there have been no reported deaths. The country of 105,000 has begun easing some virus restrictions after initially imposing a lockdown.

Tongan health officials say that 90% of people aged 12 and over have had at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/23 ISIS leadership crisis
SOURCE	https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2022-02-23/isiss-leadership-crisis
GIST	<p>It is only February, and already, the Islamic State (also known as ISIS) has had a rough year. ISIS’s supporters quickly went from cheering on a large prison break in northeast Syria to learning, days later, that the group’s reclusive leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, was killed in a daring U.S. special operations raid.</p> <p>Before Qurayshi’s death, there was growing concern that ISIS might be resurgent. Beyond the prison break in Syria, where ISIS fighters had managed to maintain control of the facility for several days despite a powerful military assault by U.S. and Kurdish-led forces, there were other troubling signs of the group’s vitality. A February report from the UN Security Council sanctions monitoring team expressed alarm at ISIS’s growing power in various central African provinces and its resurgence in Afghanistan now that U.S. troops are gone. In Iraq and Syria, even though ISIS has been conducting fewer guerrilla activities, there are still stark political and sectarian divisions, rural areas stressed by climate change, and post-pandemic economic difficulties—all of which could fuel an ISIS comeback.</p>

With Qurayshi's death, however, the prospect of a serious comeback any time soon looks less likely. Targeted killings rarely end movements like ISIS, but this one has forced an important leadership transition on the terrorist organization. The United States has killed many of its leaders in the past, but the timing of this loss is particularly bad for the group: it suffers from dwindling cash supplies, a thin bench of replacement leaders, and a decline in operations in its heartland of Iraq. ISIS's core leadership in Iraq and Syria must now make a strong case for why the organization's franchises around the world should pledge allegiance to a leader who will likely be as anonymous as Qurayshi. Whether they succeed or fail will decide ISIS's fate as a global enterprise connecting jihadist groups from West Africa to East Asia.

A HIGH-TURNOVER JOB

Both locally and globally, ISIS is held together by its members' general acceptance of their leader as legitimate. ISIS must now select its fourth leader in history, and there is reason to believe that this will be its most difficult transition.

In 2004, the infamous Abu Musab al-Zarqawi pledged his small group to Osama bin Laden, and the group became known as al Qaeda in Iraq. Months after Zarqawi was killed in a 2006 American airstrike, his followers formed the Islamic State of Iraq—later expanding into Syria and rebranding themselves as ISIS. In doing so, they established leadership succession practices that the group has followed to this day.

As its leaders explained in a publication released in 2006, the group would adopt the caliph selection practices used in the first Islamic State (established in 622 CE), quoting religious scholars and the historian Ibn Khaldun as justification for a readoption of traditional practice. Drawing from this guidance, ISIS's chiefs formed a leader-selection committee with representatives from the various groups that merged to create the proto-state. They agreed that the most important criterion for choosing a supreme leader was superior religious knowledge. And as an unwritten requirement, they established the practice of selecting a documented descendant of the Prophet Muhammad's Quraysh tribe, a collection of clans that traditionally governed Mecca. The idea was to build legitimacy into the succession process by tying it to the tribal identity of the first four caliphs who ruled after Prophet Muhammad's death.

The next ISIS leader will likely be announced in the coming weeks.

Zarqawi's successor as the leader of the new Islamic State of Iraq was Abu Umar al-Baghdadi, a veteran of al Qaeda in Iraq with a traceable lineage to the Prophet Mohammad's Quraysh tribe. He was killed in 2010 by U.S. and Iraqi special operations. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurayshi was selected in the same manner after several weeks of silence and went on to lead a resurgence of the group and the declaration of the caliphate. He was killed by U.S. special operations forces in 2019 in Syria, and replaced by Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi after a five day period.

Given this historical precedent, it is highly likely that the next leader will be announced in the coming weeks and that he will have a résumé like his predecessors: he will be a religious scholar and jihadi veteran with Qurayshi lineage who is in ISIS's inner leadership circle. What the group hopes will follow is a series of public renewals of the allegiance pledge to the caliph by ISIS's members and global affiliates.

After all, ISIS's claims of authority rely on the acknowledgement and acceptance by constituents.

This time around, however, ISIS may confront obstacles during the succession process given the problems associated with Qurayshi's tenure. Like his predecessor, Qurayshi took over during a [down-cycle](#) but had no major successes during his tenure. He had risen rapidly up ISIS's ranks since 2007, and by 2014 was one of Baghdadi's top religious advisers who allegedly argued for the genocide of Iraq's Yazidi communities. Qurayshi had a leg amputated while serving Baghdadi, possibly as a result of a 2015 airstrike targeting top ISIS leaders. But his reign was dogged by stories about his days as a U.S. informant, especially after the U.S. government released [interrogation files](#) showing that he had [willingly provided](#) detailed insights about ISIS's early days to his U.S. captors when he was in prison in Iraq. He even divulged information that helped the U.S. military kill his supervisor and al Qaeda in Iraq's no. 2 leader, Abu Qaswarah, in 2008.

In many ways, Qurayshi took over an organization with problems in [Iraq](#) and Syria but was well prepared by his predecessor to manage a global insurgency. Qurayshi continued to support the group's far-flung franchises with money and advisers, a gambit that kept supporters' morale up as the group struggled to make ground in its historic core areas. As ignominious in life as in death, Qurayshi's final act was to kill his wife and children when he detonated explosives during the U.S. raid. In his wake, ISIS confronts a perilous path.

HELP WANTED

ISIS's inner circle now finds itself in a precarious position with two basic options for a new leader, either of which opens a range of possibilities. The first, and most likely, is that the group follows its established succession processes but lands on a leader who is markedly different from his predecessors. For example, the group could pick a non-Iraqi leader, perhaps a Syrian, a choice that would all but confirm a slight shift in its center of gravity from Iraq to [Syria](#). Another possibility is that the next caliph emerges from ISIS's new generation—someone who, unlike his predecessors, has no connection with the founding fathers who first fought against the occupiers in Iraq well over a decade ago. This could improve its support among the current generation of supporters who are much more passionate about the plight of Sunni Arabs in Syria than the Iraq war of two decades ago.

The second option is that ISIS abandons its established practices in selecting Qurayshi's replacement, suggesting that its leaders are divided or too deep in hiding. It's conceivable, for example, that ISIS does not acknowledge the death of its leader, hinting that the United States is in error (once again) about the identity of its leader. Alternatively, a leader may bypass the established succession process and claim authority on his own—an almost certain sign of internal instability. And any new leader, whether he emerges from a formal process or not, could find his authority contested. In all these irregular scenarios, there is a very real threat of infighting, which would make the ISIS threat more volatile if less coherent.

ISIS is more vulnerable now than it was three years ago.

Beyond the parochial interests of the core and leadership council, the ISIS franchises of the world are waiting to see who the new leader is, as the choice relates to why they joined ISIS in the first place—the perceived legitimacy of a global caliph in the tradition of the Islamic empire. A year before Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's killing in 2019, the West Africa province [openly deliberated](#) the validity of its pledge to the caliph and determined that it was still legitimate because he was chosen by the esteemed selection council. Just a year later, it [renewed its pledge](#) to the unknown Qurayshi along with all other provinces, a coup for the ISIS succession process. After Qurayshi's short two-year tenure, during which they did not hear from him once, will they collectively decide to double down on their faith-based bet? And will they receive the same support from the new—and likely just as anonymous—leader? Some groups may decide that the notoriety of being an ISIS franchise is not worth this risk and strike out on their own.

U.S. President Joe Biden got a much-needed win with the killing of Qurayshi. In a test of its shift to an [“over-the-horizon”](#) counterterrorism approach, the Pentagon directed a special operations raid from Iraq up to the shadow of the Turkish border. The operation was an unmitigated success. And it justifies continued pressure on an ISIS that is more vulnerable now than it was three years ago, as it lost territory and suffered the death of Baghdadi.

This victory came just in time. The debacle of the U.S. [withdrawal](#) from Afghanistan, along with Chinese aggression over [Taiwan](#) and Russian aggression over [Ukraine](#), has caused allies to wonder if the United States can do two things at once: deter great powers and fight jihadists. With Qurayshi's death, however, European capitals have breathed a long sigh of relief. If ISIS was planning terrorist attacks in European cities, chances are they are now a much lower priority for the group as it braces for the drama of having to choose a new leader again.

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HEADLINE	02/22 UN: maritime terrorists threat to Africa
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/02/22/drones-could-help-tackle-maritime-terrorists-as-un-warns-of-major-threat-in-africa/

GIST

Drones could help countries respond to maritime terrorists as the UN warns of a growing number of extremist groups gaining access to nations via sea routes in Africa.

Rocco Messina, head of border security management at the UN Counter-terrorism Centre, has said that terrorist groups are now carrying out attacks in African ports and that security is “critical”.

“There is capacity of such groups to take control of key maritime infrastructures, such as ports,” Mr Messina said.

Mr Messina made his comments during a webinar hosted by the UN on Tuesday to discuss technology and maritime border security.

He said it is “vital to find a solution” to the problem to prevent the travel and relocation of foreign terrorist fighters as they pose a “major” risk.

“Maritime borders must be protected by ensuring the security of ports,” he said.

“Surveillance technologies and high standards of security protocol are really critical. Relevant information about terrorist threats in maritime zones should be shared in real time.”

Robert Kibor, legal and policy adviser for Kenya’s National Counter-terrorism Centre, said the threat from extremists is now more severe than that of pirates.

“We have succeeded in terms of suppressing piracy but we are now seeing a new threat to maritime security in the form of terrorism and armed robberies at sea,” he said.

“We have moved from piracy to terrorism and this is bringing a lot of challenges. There are a number of solutions that we think can help this particular menace, information sharing, investigations and prosecutions and cross maritime borders.

“This is something we can all achieve if we work together.”

The use of drones and radar technology could be used in the fight to combat the terrorists, said Denys Reva, a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies.

“Maritime border security is a really complex matter,” he said.

“Crime groups have been exploiting vulnerabilities for hundreds of years and now terrorist groups are exploiting the existing gaps in border protection. Recent evidence suggests terrorist groups are making use of maritime travel in both East and West Africa.”

He said smaller boats are difficult to pick up on satellites and measures need to be enacted to better identify them.

“We cannot always rely on patrol vessels because they take their time to arrive and allow other actors to escape but this is where unmanned aerial vehicles could come into force,” he said.

“The use of drones have become a viable option and Nigeria is using them in its counter-piracy initiative and radars could be used to detect smaller vessels, especially at night and in bad weather.”

This week, the US began its yearly counter-terrorism training programme for African forces in the Ivory Coast.

“A main focus is information sharing. If we can't communicate, we can't work together,” said Admiral Jamie Sands, commander of US Special Operations Command Africa.

	The training programme, known as Flintlock, brings together more than 400 soldiers from across West Africa to bolster their skills as they confront attacks by armed groups linked to Al Qaeda and ISIS.
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HEADLINE	02/22 Court upholds Hasson terror sentence
SOURCE	https://www.newsweek.com/sentence-alleged-domestic-terrorist-christopher-hasson-upheld-1681509
GIST	<p>A federal court agreed Tuesday to uphold the sentence of Christopher Hasson, a former Coast Guard officer who was accused of stockpiling weapons to launch a domestic terrorist attack.</p> <p>In 2020, Hasson was sentenced to 13 years and four months in prison, but he argued the "terrorism enhancement" that extended his sentence length was not valid because he was not convicted of a terrorism-related crime, the Associated Press reported. However, the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' panel of three judges denied the appeal. That denial allowed the court to apply this enhancement even if the original offense is not directly related to terrorism.</p> <p>When Hasson's Silver Spring, Maryland, apartment was first searched, authorities found 15 guns and over 1,000 rounds of ammunition, according to the AP report. He received the sentence after pleading guilty to possessing unregistered silencers, possessing firearms as a drug addict and illegal possession of the opioid tramadol.</p> <p>A statement from the U.S. Department of Justice said Hasson also acquired items like knives, camping supplies, steel body armor plates, tactical vests and smoke grenades for his alleged planned attack.</p> <p>Evidence from the prosecution showed Hasson had white supremacist beliefs and highlighted the possibility he was considering using the weapons stockpile to harm prominent U.S. political figures.</p> <p>Prosecutors from the Justice Department said the attacks Hasson was allegedly planning were inspired by Anders Behring Breivik's 2011 attack in Norway. Newsweek previously reported Breivik wrote a neo-Nazi manifesto before killing 77 people, most of whom were teenagers, saying they were targeted because they "embraced multiculturalism." The department's statement said Hasson had emailed the manifesto, as well as "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski's manifesto and Atlanta Olympics bomber Eric Rudolph's memoir, to his Coast Guard computer.</p> <p>The statement added that in writings, Hasson identified himself as a white nationalist of 30 years, saying he supported "focused violence" to establish a "white homeland."</p> <p>According to the AP, the prosecutors said Hasson created a "hit list" in a spreadsheet, naming political figures like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer, as well as journalists like MSNBC's Chris Hayes. Prosecutors added that looking through Hasson's search history also uncovered that he had looked into whether Supreme Court justices are "protected," then shortly afterward searched two justices' addresses.</p> <p>The Justice Department's statement said he had also registered for an online sniper and sharpshooter forum and had studied shooting tactics.</p> <p>Due to this evidence, U.S. District Judge George Hazel concluded Hasson was planning a "mass casualty assault as a way to act out his white nationalist views," according to the AP. The terrorism enhancement increased his sentence range from 41 to 51 months to 151 to 188 months.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Pakistan faces militant attacks
SOURCE	https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/22/pakistan-taliban-terrorism-militant-groups/
GIST	ISLAMABAD—Complex, simultaneous attacks on two regional Pakistan Army headquarters in remote Balochistan have focused attention on the capacity and audacity of homegrown militant groups emboldened and even enabled by the victory of the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan.

The assault on the paramilitary headquarters in Panjgur lasted three days, and the one in Nushki a day, and coincided with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Beijing for the Olympics opening ceremony and talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping. A senior Pakistani official, speaking anonymously, said 22 attackers and 13 soldiers were killed in the Feb. 2-5 attacks, which were claimed by Baloch separatists. Sources in Pakistan—including officials and diplomats who spoke on condition of anonymity—were alarmed by the sophistication and capability on display in the attacks. The Baloch Liberation Army had also claimed an attack a few weeks earlier.

The resurgence of domestic terrorism in Pakistan is a bitter, but not unexpected, harvest for Islamabad, which spent the last two decades supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan, only to see the latter's eventual success boomerang and undermine Pakistan's own security.

Pakistan now accuses the Taliban in Afghanistan of harboring militant groups that seek the overthrow of the Pakistani state. Militant attacks have increased alarmingly since May 2021, coinciding with the Afghan Taliban's ultimately victorious offensive, according to the [Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies](#) (PICSS). It noted the deadliest month for attacks in Pakistan was August, when the Afghan Taliban retook power in Kabul.

PICSS counted 294 attacks in Pakistan last year—a 56 percent rise over 2020—resulting in 395 deaths and more than 600 wounded. It said 104 of those attacks happened in Balochistan, with 103 in the restive tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Both share borders with Afghanistan; Balochistan also borders Iran.

The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has long had ties to the Afghan Taliban, was driven into Afghanistan's eastern provinces from the North and South Waziristan tribal areas in Pakistan Army operations in 2014 and 2015. The United States Institute of Peace [last year described](#) the TTP as a “greatly diminished force but not a toothless one” and added that its “relationships with other militant groups—particularly the Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISK [the Afghanistan chapter of the Islamic State]—have been critical in providing the group with material benefits, as well as legitimizing its ideology.”

And the fall of Afghanistan—once meant to provide Pakistan with “strategic depth”—has directly impacted Islamabad's own security. The departure of U.S. and international forces and the collapse of the Afghan republic meant drone strikes and ground operations against the TTP in Afghanistan ceased in the middle of last year. The United Nations Security Council [puts](#) the number of TTP militants in Afghanistan at 3,000-5,000.

But Pakistan's woes aren't just due to the fall of the Afghan republic. Domestic militant threats are expected to intensify amid a toxic cocktail of economic deprivation, social marginalization, heavy-handed security, ethnic nationalism, and tribalism. Across the country, attacks are on the rise. Baloch and Pashtun nationalists are chafing against forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and tight media controls.

There's also the perception that big Chinese investments, especially in Balochistan, under the guise of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor aren't trickling down. The senior Pakistani official attributed the early February attacks in Balochistan to ire over China's economic and financial stranglehold on Islamabad. “The aim was to downgrade the relationship with China,” the official said.

“In any other country, including my own, these attacks would be called civil war,” said a Western diplomat, who spoke on condition of anonymity. “Things are getting worse, but will it explode? No, and for no other reason than that the military is there.” The Pakistan Army is entrenching its control over the civilian administration, courts, media, and civil society, justifying its actions with traditional anti-India rhetoric as well as the uptick in homegrown terrorism.

Pakistan's hopes that it could rely on Taliban pledges to ensure that it would not be the target of terrorist attacks from across the border have been disappointed. Disputes over the colonial-era Durand Line, recognized by Pakistan but not by successive Afghan governments, have also continued into the new Taliban era. Pakistan now accuses the Afghan Taliban of giving the TTP cover to launch attacks on Pakistan. Last week, Islamabad also used the U.N. Security Council to accuse India of supporting the TTP and its offshoot Jamaat-ul-Ahrar in Afghan territory.

"I believe that instead of finding strategic depth in Afghanistan, Pakistan has handed over a strategic depth in Pakistan to the Taliban," said Mohsin Dawar, a lawmaker from North Waziristan.

"The dangerous thing in the Pakistani context is that the Pakistani generals have no motivation to fight militancy because there is no foreign aid. Until now, whatever they got was heavily funded by the United States. So, even if they wanted to do something, how do they do it? They don't have money. The economy is collapsing," said Dawar, who is chair of the Pashtun-nationalist National Democratic Movement.

Security experts said the Pakistani military has been trying to negotiate with the TTP and accommodate the group politically in order to defuse its potential for violence. Simbal Khan, a conflict and security advisor at the United Nations Development Program in Pakistan, said the military has fortified its presence both in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, allowing stronger links with local communities. Together, the two regions comprise half of Pakistan's territory. Balochistan is the largest of Pakistan's four states, with a population of just 12 million of the country's total 220 million. It's rich in natural resources, including oil, coal, copper, gold, and iron ore, and shares a 500-mile border with Iran.

"Each district center is being built now, setting up administrative centers, [with] more push for access to health, education, legal rights for women. Outreach is slow, but because of the roads and the [reach of] the government, it is slowly changing," Khan said.

"With the infrastructure the military has on the ground both in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which they have been able to build over the last 10 years, they will be able to contain" the militant threat, she said.

Still, as Pakistan becomes increasingly militarized against internal foes, ignoring broader regional and global developments, a descent into civil war is possible, said Afrasiab Khattak, a former president of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Like many in Pakistan, including the prime minister, he believes a new cold war looms, pitting the West against China and Russia. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Khattak said, would ensure continued instability in Pakistan, which he believes is part of a broader U.S. plan for containing China.

Khattak said the Taliban's victory in Afghanistan would lead to gurg ashti, a phrase used in Urdu meaning the "peace of wolves"—uneasy, unpredictable, volatile—in the region, amid rising tensions between China, Russia, and Iran.

"Pakistan should have a policy towards Afghanistan, the way China has a policy towards Pakistan," he said. "The present policy is very dangerous. It's suicidal. They are not reaching out to ordinary non-Taliban Afghans. And the trouble I see coming is not national, it is not regional—it is international."

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HEADLINE	02/22 Germany: 1,950 potentially violent Islamists
SOURCE	https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/uk-news/2022/02/22/germany-home-to-1950-potentially-violent-islamist-extremists/
GIST	The German government has revealed there are about 1,950 potentially violent Islamist extremists in the country.

	<p>These people were assessed by the Interior Ministry as both extreme in their beliefs and either known to be violent or showing a willingness to commit violent acts.</p> <p>They were the most dangerous of the roughly 29,000 people believed to have Islamist extremist tendencies in Germany, who in turn are a minority of the approximately 5.5 million Muslims in the country.</p> <p>Ministers have described right-wing extremism as the main threat to Germany's constitutional order, but sporadic Islamist extremist attacks, including an attack at a Berlin Christmas market in 2016, have rattled the country.</p> <p>In a written answer to a question from MPs, the ministry said those identified did not necessarily belong to Islamist extremist organisations but were tallied up when evidence of their violent tendencies emerged.</p> <p>German intelligence services say the Salafist scene is the main ideological underpinning for violent extremism, although it has stagnated in size in recent years.</p> <p>The foreign intelligence service separately raised the alarm this month about extremists in Germany travelling to Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover.</p> <p>About 1,150 people have left Germany to travel to Syria and Iraq in recent years, as the influence of ISIS has grown.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/21 Followers: join ISIS North America in US
SOURCE	https://www.hstoday.us/featured/isis-supporters-in-the-united-states-urged-to-join-isis-north-america/
GIST	<p>A video posted online urges followers of the Islamic State to help form a province of the terror group in the United States called ISIS North America.</p> <p>The video is dated “new 2022” in the first frame and was posted on a file-sharing site this month. It consists of simple white English-language writing on a black background, instead of being dressed up with images of ISIS battles or adherents as in many videos with higher production value associated with the terror group.</p> <p>Propaganda including videos, magazines, online memes, instructional leaflets, etc., is produced both through official ISIS channels and — more prolifically since the fall of the declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria — by independent groups and lone actors waging what they call “media jihad.” Regardless of the production source, this ISIS-supporting propaganda is intended to recruit, threaten, and incite, with a particular emphasis on urging followers to use accessible weapons and attack soft targets on their home turf.</p> <p>“To those who want to try,” it begins with an ISIS flag as a nasheed plays. “To my brothers following in the path of the Khilafa in America I urge you to come join our group.”</p> <p>“This new group will operate in the United States to surprise the murtad in their own lands,” the video continues. The wording suggests that the group intends to target Muslims seen as turning their back on ISIS’ interpretation of Islam — how the terror group defines apostasy — instead of the general population, referred to as kuffar or disbelievers.</p> <p>“The name of this group will be named ISIS-NA (Islamic State of Iraq & Sham – North America),” the video states. It then shows imaginings of the Nevada and California flags as “Flag of Tawheed” — the concept of oneness in Islam and why ISIS followers make the hand gesture of raising a single index finger.</p> <p>The video says that it was linked in the comment section of Islamic State videos on the file-sharing site, assuring viewers that if they followed the link and arrived at the video “you are at the right place.”</p>

“Do not send this video anywhere else as this will alert the kuffar. Do not join if you aren’t committed [sic] to our organization and do not join to make jokes, we will trace every keylog you make if you do this,” it continues.

“My dear brother or sister, may Allah grant you good health and happiness for watching this video. Spread the word about this organization to those who are trustful but be careful with doing so,” the video cautions. “May Allah grant this organization with success and may Allah grant us Jannah [paradise].”

The video was posted by a user called “Cell of the IS,” and one of the tags on the post is Al-Furat Media Center, an official ISIS outlet that was launched in 2015 to distribute Russian-language ISIS propaganda as well as other regional languages. The only ISIS province noted in the tags is Khorasan, referring to the group in Afghanistan and the surrounding region. “Brothers do not spread this video,” it adds in the video description.

In its first English-language magazine recently released online, ISIS Khorasan declared that theirs is the “most important province” of ISIS after Iraq and Syria.

The push to ensure ISIS ranks and accompanying visuals extend far beyond the territory of the former physical caliphate began many years ago, as the terror group saw value in encouraging the formation of provinces that could recruit, train, and attack close to home. In a November 2016 audio message, late ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi referred to ISIS units in regions such as Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Indonesia, Philippines, Sinai, Bangladesh, West Africa and North Africa as the “base of the caliphate,” and warned that “kuffar [disbelievers] will try to split you.”

ISIS’ official weekly newsletter al-Naba is largely dedicated to posting updates from different provinces, and some of these regional groups also distribute content through their own media outlets.

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HEADLINE	02/22 India sends wheat to Afghanistan
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/india-sends-wheat-afghanistan-deal-pakistan-83052356
GIST	<p>NEW DELHI -- Indian authorities have sent tons of wheat to Afghanistan to help relieve desperate food shortages, after they struck a deal with neighboring rival Pakistan to allow the shipments across the shared border.</p> <p>Some 50 trucks stacked to the brim with around 2,500 tons of wheat donated by India began crossing into Pakistan on Tuesday, according to a statement by India's foreign ministry.</p> <p>“I thank the Indian government for the generosity displayed at a time when more than 20 million Afghans are facing crisis or the worse levels of food insecurity in more than 3 decades,” tweeted Farid Mamundzay, Afghanistan’s ambassador to India.</p> <p>Last week, Pakistani officials said the country would allow India — with which it shares a heavily militarized border — to deliver wheat to Afghanistan, where millions are facing dangerous food shortages.</p> <p>Under a deal with New Delhi, Pakistan allowed trucks from Afghanistan to collect wheat from India by way of the frontier crossing at Attari-Wagah. The trucks will then head for Afghanistan’s city of Jalalabad via Pakistan's Torkham border, foreign ministry officials there said last week.</p> <p>The decision from Pakistan came more than three months after India said it would deliver 50,000 metric tons of wheat and life-saving medicine to Afghanistan, whose economy is teetering on the brink of collapse in the wake of the Taliban takeover in August.</p> <p>Pakistan in recent months has also sent food and medicine to Afghanistan.</p>

Return to Top	<p>India and Pakistan have a history of bitter relations driven by their dispute over the province of Kashmir, which is divided between the two countries but claimed by both in its entirety.</p> <p>Pakistan suspended trade with India in 2019 after New Delhi stripped the Indian-controlled section of Kashmir of its statehood and special constitutional status. Since then, normal diplomatic and trade ties between them have not resumed.</p> <p>Like the rest of the world, Pakistan and India have so far not recognized the Taliban government.</p> <p>New Delhi has no diplomatic presence in Kabul after evacuating its staff ahead of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August. It did, however, meet with a Taliban representative in Qatar on Aug. 31.</p> <p>Before the Taliban took Kabul, India provided Afghan security forces with operational training and military equipment, even though it had no troops on the ground.</p> <p>The U.N. has warned that millions are on the brink of starvation in Afghanistan, with over half the population staring at extreme hunger.</p>
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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	02/22 Can Russia fool the modern world?
SOURCE	https://www.nextgov.com/emerging-tech/2022/02/what-are-false-flag-attacksand-could-russia-make-one-work-information-age/362246/
GIST	<p>In the past few weeks, U.S. officials have warned several times that Russia plans to create the appearance of an attack on its own forces and broadcast those images to the world. Such a “false flag” operation, they alleged, would give Russia the pretext to invade Ukraine by provoking shock and outrage.</p> <p>By exposing this plan, the Biden administration sought to undermine its emotional power and stop the Kremlin from manufacturing a casus belli, or justification for war.</p> <p>But false flag attacks aren’t what they used to be. With satellite photos and live video on the ground shared widely and instantly on the internet – and with journalists and armchair sleuths joining intelligence professionals in analyzing the information – it’s difficult to get away with false flag attacks today. And with the prevalence of disinformation campaigns, manufacturing a justification for war doesn’t require the expense or risk of a false flag – let alone an actual attack.</p> <p>THE LONG HISTORY OF FALSE FLAG ATTACKS</p> <p>Both false flag attacks and allegations that states engage in them have a long history. The term originated to describe pirates’ wielding of friendly (and false) flags to lure merchant ships close enough to attack. It was later used as a label for any attack – real or simulated – that the instigators inflict against “friendly” forces to incriminate an adversary and create the basis for retaliation.</p> <p>In the 20th century, there were several prominent episodes involving false flag operations. In 1939, agents from Nazi Germany broadcast anti-German messages from a German radio station near the Polish border. They also murdered several civilians whom they dressed in Polish military uniforms to create a pretext for Germany’s planned invasion of Poland.</p> <p>That same year, the Soviet Union detonated shells in Soviet territory near the Finnish border and blamed Finland, which it then proceeded to invade.</p>

The U.S. has also been implicated in similar plots. [Operation Northwoods](#) was a proposal to kill Americans and blame the attack on Castro, thereby granting the military the pretext to invade Cuba. The Kennedy administration ultimately rejected the plan.

In addition to these actual plots, there have been numerous alleged false flag attacks involving the U.S. government. The sinking of the [USS Maine](#) in 1898 and the [Gulf of Tonkin incident](#) in 1964 – each of which was a critical part of a casus belli – have been claimed as possible false flag attacks, though the evidence supporting these allegations is weak.

GLOBAL VISIBILITY, DISINFORMATION AND CYNICISM

More recent and even less fact-based is the “[9/11 Truth](#)” movement, which alleged that the Bush administration engineered the destruction of the twin towers to justify restrictions on civil liberties and lay the foundation for invading Iraq. [Right-wing pundits and politicians](#) have promoted the conspiracy theory that Democrats have staged mass shootings, such as the one at a high school in Parkland, Florida, in 2018, in order to push for gun control laws.

If people believe that false flag operations happen, it is [not because they are common](#). Instead, they gain plausibility from the [widespread perception that politicians are unscrupulous](#) and take advantage of crises.

Furthermore, governments operate in relative secrecy and have recourse to tools of coercion such as intelligence, well-trained agents and weapons to implement their agenda. It is not a huge leap to imagine that leaders deliberately cause the high-impact events that they later exploit for political gain, notwithstanding the logistical complexities, large number of people who would have to be involved and moral qualms leaders might have about murdering their own citizens.

For example, it is not controversial to note that the Bush administration used the 9/11 attacks to build support for its [invasion of Iraq](#). Yet this led some people to conclude that, since the Bush administration benefited politically from 9/11, it therefore must have caused the attacks, [despite all evidence to the contrary](#).

THE CHALLENGE OF CREDIBILITY

The willingness to believe that leaders are capable of such atrocities reflects a broader trend of [rising distrust](#) toward governments worldwide, which, incidentally, complicates matters for leaders who intend to carry out false flag attacks. If the impact of such attacks has historically come from their ability to rally citizens around their leader, false flag attacks staged today may not only fail to provoke outrage against the purported aggressor, but they can also backfire by casting suspicion on the leaders who stand to benefit. Furthermore, investigators using open source intelligence, such as the [Bellingcat collective](#) of citizen internet sleuths, make it more difficult for governments to get away with egregious violations of laws and international norms.

Even as the Biden administration attempts to blunt Russia’s ability to seize the initiative, it too faces credibility challenges. Reporters were justifiably [skeptical of State Department spokesman](#) Ned Price’s warning about Russia’s false flag plans, especially since he did not provide evidence for the claim.

Skeptics pointed to the August 2021 drone strike during the U.S. withdrawal from Kabul, which the military initially asserted was a “righteous strike” to kill a suicide bomber but that later turned out to be a mistaken attack on an innocent man and his family. It took [overwhelming and undeniable evidence](#) from media investigations before the U.S. government admitted the mistake.

Insofar as the Kremlin might expect to benefit from executing a false flag attack, it would be to manufacture a casus belli among Russian citizens rather than to persuade audiences abroad. Surveys have shown that the vast majority of Russians are [opposed to invading Ukraine](#), yet they also harbor negative attitudes toward NATO.

The spectacle of a provocation aimed against Russia on state-run television might provide a jolt of support for an invasion, at least initially. At the same time, Russians are [cynical about their own leaders](#) and might harbor the suspicion that a purported attack was manufactured for political gain.

FALSE FLAG ALTERNATIVES

In any event, Russia has other options to facilitate an invasion. At the start of its incursion into Crimea in 2014, the Kremlin used “[active measures](#),” including disinformation and deception, to prevent Ukrainian resistance and secure domestic approval. Russia and other post-Soviet states are also prone to claim a “[provocation](#),” which frames any military action as a justified response rather than a first move.

By contrast, false flag operations are complex and perhaps overly theatrical in a way that invites unwanted scrutiny. Governments seeking to sway public opinion face far greater challenges today than they did in the 20th century. False flag attacks are risky, while leaders seeking to manufacture a casus belli can select from a range of subtler and less costly alternatives.

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HEADLINE	02/23 UN: wildfires 30% increase by 2050
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/feb/23/climate-crisis-driving-increase-in-wildfires-across-globe-says-report-aoe
GIST	<p>Wildfires that have devastated California, Australia and Siberia will become 50% more common by the end of the century, according to a new report that warns of uncontrollable blazes ravaging previously unaffected parts of the planet.</p> <p>The escalating climate crisis and land-use change are driving a global increase in extreme wildfires, with a 14% increase predicted by 2030 and a 30% increase by 2050, according to a UN report involving more than 50 international researchers.</p> <p>The findings suggest there should be a radical change in public spending on wildfires. The report said governments were putting their money in the wrong place by focusing on the work of emergency services when preventing fires would be a more effective approach.</p> <p>Wildfires are becoming an expected part of life on every continent, except Antarctica, destroying the environment, wildlife, human health and infrastructure, according to the report, which was written in collaboration with GRID-Arendal, a non-profit environmental communications centre. The report warned of a “dramatic shift in fire regimes worldwide”.</p> <p>“From Australia to Canada, the United States to China, across Europe and the Amazon, wildfires are wreaking havoc on the environment, wildlife, human health and infrastructure,” the foreword of the report said, adding that while the situation “is certainly extreme, it is not yet hopeless”.</p> <p>Although “landscape fires” are essential for some ecosystems to function properly, the report looks specifically at “wildfires”, which it defines as unusual free-burning vegetation fires that pose a risk society, the economy or environment. This month, researchers found global heating could cause “megafires resistant to fire-suppression practices” in southern California. In the US, nearly 3m hectares (7.7m acres) of land were burned by wildfires last year, with blazes becoming increasingly hard to fight.</p> <p>Direct responses to wildfires receive more than 50% of funding now, while planning and prevention get less than 1%. The paper calls for a “fire-ready formula” with investments rebalanced so half goes on planning, preventing and preparedness, about a third on response and 20% for recovery.</p> <p>Prof Sally Archibald, an ecologist at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, who was involved in the report, said: “This is a really important conclusion that I hope diverts money and resources in the right direction, as well as changing policies.</p>

“We cannot promise that if the world gives money for proactive fire management, there will be no more extreme fire events because these fires are caused by global climate change,” she said. “But it would certainly help us minimise the impact and minimise the loss of damage.”

There are many natural solutions, including starting controlled fires using prescribed burning, managing landscapes by grazing animals to reduce the amount of flammable material in the landscape, as well as removing trees too close to people’s homes.

There should be more science-based monitoring systems combined with indigenous knowledge and better international cooperation, the paper’s authors said, ahead of the [UN Environment Assembly](#) in Nairobi.

“After a century of research we’ve come around to agreeing that how people burn their landscapes traditionally in Africa is probably the most appropriate for the ecosystem,” said Archibald.

Fire-management strategies vary globally, but as a [very general rule](#), experts believe that ecosystems closer to the equator should have more controlled fires, and those farther away should have fewer. Exceptions include tropical forests such as the Amazon, which straddle the equator yet should have very few fires.

“It’s not a one-size-fits-all situation. Fire is like rainfall – you get different types of fire in different parts of the world,” said Archibald.

Wildfires have exacerbated the climate crisis by destroying carbon-rich ecosystems such as peatlands, permafrost and forests, making the landscape more flammable. Restoring ecosystems such as wetlands and peatlands helps prevent fires from happening and creates buffers in the landscape.

Climate change increases the conditions in which wildfires start, including more drought, higher air temperatures and strong winds. Equally, carbon emissions from wildfires are at an [all-time high](#). Tackling the climate crisis is a key priority in wildfire prevention, the report said.

It also called for better health and safety standards for firefighters, including raising awareness of the dangers of smoke inhalation, reducing their exposure to life-threatening situations, and encouraging proper recovery between shifts.

Inger Andersen, director of the UN Environment Programme, said: “We have to minimise the risk of extreme wildfires by being better prepared: invest more in fire-risk reduction, work with local communities and strengthen global commitment to fight climate change.”

Prof Guillermo Rein, at Imperial College London, who was not involved in the paper, said it was good to read an “extensive and international overview” of how fire management needed to change.

“The full report is impressive. It says so many good and important things,” he said. “Especially important is the emphasis on extreme wildfires and the recommendation for [a] move from reaction to prevention and preparedness.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Puget Sound seaweed farming interest?
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/seaweed-agriculture-puget-sound/281-5f43ceff-2776-48b1-b92a-782e008f4a4b
GIST	SEATTLE — In winter, when the water is cold and clear, the conditions in Puget Sound are ideal for shellfish. Marine biologist Joth Davis says it's also great for kelp. "It's got a kind of nutty flavor, and it's firm and crisp. So, it's not at all what you'd expect," Davis said.

Kelp thrives in the Hood Canal. It's what geographers call a fjord: deep in the center, shallower on the edges and perfect for seaweed production, according to Davis.

"It's got lots of nitrogen, which is helpful because that's what seaweed needs to grow," Davis said. "At the end of March, we can have blades that are 12-feet long. It's really quite amazing."

Seaweed cultivation is a long-established industry in Asia. It has picked up on the East Coast, and aquaculture is valued in the Pacific Northwest. But seaweed production, in particular, has yet to catch on.

"I think interest is booming," said Jodie Toft, deputy director at the Puget Sound Restoration Fund, a nonprofit that works to restore marine habitat through collaborative projects.

But Toft is less certain if seaweed cultivation can become a wide-scale commercial operation in the Sound.

"I'm not sure if that's quite what we're headed for in the southern Salish Sea just because of some of the other constraints that we already have," Toft said.

Toft said a farmer interested in getting into seaweed in Washington state would need to acquire a series of permits and "buy in" approval from the region's indigenous tribes. Once the permit for a farm site is approved, commercial kelp seed would also need to be obtained.

"We're not quite there yet for having commercial seed available. I imagine Puget Sound will get there as a community in the next couple of years," Toft said.

"We are not going to grow kelp without having a use for it," Davis said.

Davis has been in marine farming for more than 30 years. After getting his PhD in fisheries science at the University of Washington, Davis realized seaweed is also good at reversing the effects of climate change.

Before kelp, Davis raised oysters, which revealed what seaweed can do to reduce ocean acidification.

The phenomenon occurs when carbon dioxide in the air soaks into the sea and then undergoes a chemical reaction that releases carbonic acid in the ocean.

"Its nickname is 'global warming's evil twin,'" said Meg Chadsey.

Chadsey is an ocean acidification specialist at UW's Sea Grant program. She says the concerns over ocean acidification first emerged from those who noticed it in Puget Sound, thanks to the area's large shellfish industry.

"Those shellfish have shells made out of calcium carbonate, which dissolves when seawater gets too acidic," Chadsey said.

And local hatcheries have begun to notice.

"When those juvenile shellfish started to suffer and, in some cases, die because of acidification, the alarm bells went off because people saw it happening," Chadsey said.

Seaweeds are by definition, algae. But, like plants, they also absorb Co₂ and turn it into oxygen.

"So the idea is, if carbon dioxide in the water is the source of the problem from the shellfish, then if you take the carbon dioxide back out, at least very locally, that might improve the sea water conditions so that the shellfish are not as harmed by the acidification," Chadsey said.

Marine biologists like Davis, who already had that oyster farm near Hood Head, got the green light to experiment further in 2016.

"It enabled us to basically build a kelp farm, and we did that. Then we found out, gosh, it just grows so well here," Davis said.

He also wondered about kelp's commercial potential. His two-and-a half acre seaweed farm, a part of Blue Dot Sea Farms, yields 12,000 to 15,000 pounds of kelp a year, Davis said.

"Growing kelp is actually fairly easy to do. Figuring out what to do with kelp is a lot more difficult," Davis said.

"It is a very challenging endeavor," said Markos Scheer.

Scheer splits his time between Bainbridge Island and his own kelp operation, Seagrove Kelp Co., in southeast Alaska. He's a maritime law attorney who became interested in the prospects of a seaweed boom.

"About 2015, I started looking at this. Why hasn't this happened?" Scheer said.

Scheer and Davis said a strict permitting process makes it challenging to launch a seaweed farm.

"That's just the way it is here in this state. We're well regulated, and as a result, there are folks that are in the permit stage now trying to get permits to do what we're doing," Davis said.

Toft said applicants would start with the Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application process, which involves local, federal and state agencies such as the Washington Department of Natural Resources.

"Seaweed farming is new to our area. So, there is no playbook that you can go to, even for the agencies that are in charge of this process," Chadsey added.

And seaweed is a relatively new food item among Americans.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Student 'experimenting'; rocket fuel fireball
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/02/22/byu-rocket-fuel/
GIST	<p>When police and fire crews responded to a blaze caused by an explosion at a Brigham Young University dorm, they found that it had been caused by a resident's homemade "experiment" — rocket fuel.</p> <p>The 22-year-old was cooking up about five pounds of a volatile mixture on the stovetop — wanting to experiment after seeing something about it online — when it "suddenly exploded into a fireball," according to the BYU Police Department. Smoke was billowing out into the hallway, and the "intense heat" from the flames triggered the sprinkler system, flooding a main floor.</p> <p>"It wasn't a small amount — it was a potful," said BYU Police Lt. Jeff Long about what the resident in the Provo, Utah, campus building had been making. "It really could have been catastrophic."</p> <p>There were no injuries, and Long said everyone was "so fortunate it didn't engulf that entire building."</p> <p>Investigators are determining the extent of the damage, but Long estimated that it may cost at least \$100,000 for cleanup and kitchen appliance replacements. The male student could be criminally charged with reckless burning or reckless endangerment, Long said, adding that fire and police investigators are discussing potential charges.</p> <p>The incident, he said, was "nothing nefarious."</p>

	<p>“He was just experimenting,” Long said.</p> <p>The resident has been cooperative and took sole responsibility for the incident. Authorities have not identified the individual, Long said.</p> <p>A university spokesperson did not immediately share additional details about the incident with The Washington Post.</p> <p>Photos shared by the police department show blackened, bubbling cabinets and walls, stretching up from a scorched stovetop. Other images show the hallway with standing water.</p> <p>Because of the damage, largely from sprinkler flooding, 22 students have been displaced and are being housed elsewhere on campus, Long said. It could take two weeks for some of the affected areas to be dried out and cleaned up.</p> <p>“This has definitely affected a lot of hard-working students,” he said. “You think homework, computers — all their work they’re putting into this semester has been drenched. They’re drying themselves out and just getting their stuff together.”</p> <p>“Please keep your experiments in the lab and supervised by trained professionals,” the police department posted on Facebook after the explosion.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Woman trapped 9 days impounded car
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/woman-spent-9-days-trapped-in-a-vehicle-impounded-in-burien-police-say/
GIST	<p>Officers found a missing woman with disabilities after she spent nine days inside an abandoned vehicle in near-freezing weather after it had been towed to a Burien impound lot, police said Tuesday.</p> <p>The 28-year-old woman was found Feb. 14, nine days after she was last seen, and taken to a hospital in serious condition, Kent police said in a news release. Police did not say whether the woman’s 45-year-old mother will be criminally charged after she parked the vehicle at a Kent gas station and then left while her daughter was inside earlier this month.</p> <p>Investigators learned that gas station staff called a private tow company, which towed the vehicle to Burien, police said. Officers contacted the company, Skyway Towing in Burien, and employees found the woman inside the vehicle.</p> <p>It’s usual for employees to tow vehicles without checking inside, said Bob Pauza, general manager for Skyway Towing. He said the tow truck driver looked through the windows, but didn’t see anyone inside.</p> <p>After police contacted the company, a driver searched the car, a 2004 Cadillac, and found the woman lying on the back seat covered with clothes and other items, Pauza said.</p> <p>“We can’t really take credit for it,” Pauza said. “Police are the real heroes.”</p> <p>She has not been identified nor have police disclosed the nature of her disability.</p> <p>The woman was reportedly last seen on Feb. 5 with her mother at a gas station.</p> <p>The woman was reported missing on Feb. 14 by her sister, who told police she had not seen or heard from her since early February, according to police.</p>

“We are extremely relieved that we were able to locate and rescue the victim. If not for the efforts of our officers and the support of King County Sheriffs and Fire, this incident would likely have ended in tragedy” said Kent police Chief Rafael Padilla in a news release.

Detectives are still investigating the incident. No other information was immediately available.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/22 Judges suppress WSP lab blood evidence
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/panel-of-seattle-judges-suppresses-blood-evidence-due-to-meth-contamination-at-patrol-lab/
GIST	<p>A panel of Seattle Municipal Court judges has suppressed more than three years’ worth of blood toxicology test results involving methamphetamine and amphetamine due to meth contamination at the Washington State Patrol’s forensic toxicology lab in South Seattle.</p> <p>The judges issued their ruling Feb. 10 after hearing testimony over three days in January involving three criminal cases where meth was found in blood samples from three people arrested in 2018 and 2019 by Seattle police and charged by the Seattle City Attorney’s Office with driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, a gross misdemeanor.</p> <p>The three defendants sought to have the charges against them dismissed outright, but the judges — who determined the contamination at the toxicology lab constituted an “issue of citywide significance” — found dismissal was too extreme a remedy. Instead, the judges ordered suppression of positive blood test results for meth and amphetamine from March 2018 to October 2021.</p> <p>Two of the three Seattle defendants also tested positive for drugs other than meth or amphetamine — marijuana in one case, morphine in the other — and the judges ruled those results can be admitted as evidence at their upcoming trials.</p> <p>Scientists in the Patrol’s crime laboratory — a separate lab that handles the bulk of forensic work other than toxicology tests — started cooking meth, apparently to learn the process, in a third-floor exam room in 2002, The Seattle Times reported in July.</p> <p>The scientists synthesized the controlled substance 10 to 20 times in the room from 2002 to 2011. After the crime lab moved out, the cramped toxicology lab, operating across a main hallway on the same floor, moved in in March 2018.</p> <p>That November, a blood sample tested in the annex resulted in a false positive for meth, though two subsequent tests came back negative, according to the judges’ ruling. Even after the annex was shut down in June 2019 and the Patrol hired a company to decontaminate the main toxicology lab, 11 more blood samples returned “discrepant results” through April 2021, the ruling says.</p> <p>That’s a dozen out of the thousands of blood samples that undergo forensic toxicology testing each year in criminal and death investigations.</p> <p>Though it’s unlikely the test results for methamphetamine in the three Seattle cases were false positives, the judges found the toxicology lab committed governmental mismanagement by continuing to conduct forensic testing on blood samples from June 2019 through October 2021, when meth contamination continued to be present in the lab.</p> <p>The toxicology lab also committed mismanagement by failing to disclose the contamination to prosecutors and defense attorneys before August 2020 and by failing to confirm positive test results for meth by</p>

sending second, unopened vials of blood to private labs for testing, according to the ruling. The lab has not faced sanctions or other consequences as a result of the meth contamination, it says.

The judges found no evidence that results from blood samples tested for alcohol or other drugs were unreliable and their ruling does not affect those DUI cases.

It's unknown how many Seattle DUI cases could be impacted by the ruling, but they will be identified by city prosecutors and defense attorneys on a case-by-case basis, says a Tuesday news release about the court's ruling.

"WSP respects the court's findings and has been forthcoming about the challenges associated with the past contamination issues as well as resolute in our attempts at appropriate mitigation and quality control going forward. We will continue our rigorous efforts to abate any contamination," Chris Loftis, a State Patrol spokesperson, said in an emailed statement.

Loftis said the Patrol agrees with the ruling that the likelihood of contamination in the three Seattle cases was not a reasonable possibility and that there was no evidence showing any falsified evidence or that any defendants' specific results are false.

"We also agree with the court's conclusion the omission of information was a result of scientific judgment rather than any desire to conceal or mislead," Loftis said in the statement.

Defense attorney Jason Lantz represents one of the Seattle defendants, a 34-year-old woman who was arrested for suspicion of DUI in October 2019 and whose blood sample tested positive for meth, amphetamine and morphine. Though happy the court provided his client some relief, Lantz called on the state Legislature to provide more money for the chronically underfunded and understaffed toxicology lab. Lantz said judges in jurisdictions outside Seattle have also ruled to suppress blood evidence that has tested positive for meth and amphetamine, citing cases he's heard about in Pierce County.

The bigger picture, he said, is that the state has created a massive backlog and bottleneck by requiring all law enforcement agencies to submit blood samples to a single toxicology lab, even though other states allow police to send blood samples to private labs. As a result, it can take 14 to 18 months before the results of toxicology tests come back.

"They pushed it to the breaking point where it did break," Lantz said of the demands placed on the toxicology lab. "This is the consequence of the failure to fund the lab. It was an inevitability that something like this would happen. This is a very predictable problem."

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HEADLINE	02/22 \$80B stolen from Covid jobless benefits
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/22/federal-officials-warn-billions-stolen-covid-unemp/
GIST	<p>Federal officials warned Tuesday that as much as \$80 billion in unemployment benefits could have fraudulently gone to cybercriminals and international crime rings.</p> <p>Officials from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the U.S. Secret Service say improper accountability measures at the federal and state levels aided the fraud throughout the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>"Criminals exploit opportunities that lead to profit and this public health crisis presented an unprecedented opportunity for both organized criminal groups and individuals," said Roy Dotson, the U.S. Secret Service's national pandemic-fraud recovery coordinator.</p> <p>Federal officials note that fraudulent activities skyrocketed after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. International syndicates and cyberhackers quickly set up fake profiles, using pilfered personal information, to steal billions from the federal government.</p>

Much of the tactics were already well known to law enforcement agencies since cybercriminals had previously used them to bilk money from disaster relief programs. The criminals had previously not targeted unemployment because of the small nature of the payout, but that changed because of the pandemic.

In mid-2020, Congress approved a \$600-a-week enhanced bonus on top of what states were already paying out for unemployment compensation. The program was later extended, though at \$300 a week through September 2021.

The White House recently estimated that as much as \$80 billion in unemployment benefits could have been siphoned off fraudulently throughout 2021 alone. The GAO says that figure is likely misleading, with the actual sum potentially varying significantly.

“We’re being very careful here in terms of what is publicly reported in terms of various estimates,” said Seto Bagdoyan, the GAO’s director of forensic audits and investigative service. “Many of these estimates appear not to be based on sound methodologies.”

Mr. Bagdoyan added that congressional lawmakers should look at enforcement statistics when attempting to understand how widespread the fraud could be.

“In terms of prosecuted fraud cases ... the Justice Department, as of January of this year, we’re talking about 131 guilty pleas, with an additional 242 individuals facing charges,” he said. “The Labor [Department] inspector general has 845 indictments as of January, with 247 convictions.”

Some of the individuals charged are accused of stealing hundreds of thousands, if not millions, in fraudulent unemployment benefits.

In February, the Justice Department announced that it had indicted a California man on charges of bilking nearly \$170,000 in fraudulent unemployment benefits by submitting multiple claims in other people’s names.

State governments on their own have already recovered more than \$1.8 billion in fraudulent payments.

Republicans say the White House and congressional Democrats have ignored efforts to properly crack down on the abuse.

Rep. Brad Wenstrup, Ohio Republican, said that Democrats on the House Ways and Means Committee had refused numerous requests to launch investigative hearings on the topic.

“I’m disappointed obviously that our Democrat colleagues have not held even one oversight hearing on this,” said Mr. Wenstrup, a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee.

Neither the White House nor the Democratic majority on that panel responded to requests for comment.

Other GOP lawmakers say the unwillingness to tackle the extent of the fraud has made it more difficult to get money into the hands of people that actually need it.

“This is not a victimless crime. Unchecked fraud delays legitimate payments from being made and diverts funding away from unemployed workers,” said Rep. Kevin Brady, Texas Republican. “It also turns thousands of Americans into unwitting identity theft victims.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Seattle PD report: troubling crime trends
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-police-release-report-showing-troubling-crime-trends
GIST	SEATTLE — The top brass from the Seattle Police Department on Tuesday presented a 12-page report to the Seattle City Council that depicted troubling crime trends in the city.

Between 2020 and 2021, overall crime is up 10 percent, violent crime has increased 20 percent and property crimes are up 9 percent, according to the information shared with the council.

The largest increase in property theft is motor vehicle parts and accessories like catalytic converters, up 79 percent.

The violent crime rate reached a 14-year high in 2021, shootings and shots fired calls are up 40 percent.

“This year our trends are already not in a good place,” Interim Seattle Police Chief Adrian Diaz said.

When compared to 2021, new staffing projections shared by the Seattle Police Department showed that total staffing growth will remain flat by the end of 2022 with around 1,137 total officers. However of those total officers, there is some growth projected in the amount who could be put on the streets.

KOMO News reported in January that 20 police officers had already left and only five had been hired, creating a sizable replacement gap.

City Council officials project that most of those departures will be related to the city's COVID vaccine mandate.

Council member Lisa Herbold said Seattle could explore adding incentives to bring in more cops.

"I am supportive of a bonus incentive program to recruit officers," she said. "I need to see that within the context of the other city departments and the needs of those departments (and) as it relates to retention programs, we have discussed the idea of a retention program."

For those needing help, response times by police have also reached their highest points in 10 years.

Mayor Harrell and city leaders have already said the department is down 350 officers.

That has also raised concern among some on the council.

“I continue to be alarmed by the lower staffing levels at our police department,” City Councilman Alex Pedersen said.

SPD wants to hire 100 new officers a year for the next five years to build up staffing.

The data also reflects community concerns, which said 21 percent say thefts and burglaries are their top concerns.

These are tied with homelessness (21%) and followed by policing issues (20%).

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HEADLINE	02/22 Audit: Seattle response to retail theft
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/audit-underway-to-assess-seattles-response-to-organized-shoplifting
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Two Seattle City Councilmembers want to try a new approach to stop organized shoplifting rings and it starts by auditing current efforts.</p> <p>Councilmembers Lisa Herbold and Andrew Lewis want the city auditor to do a full review of the city's crime-fighting efforts when it comes to retail theft. The goal is not to crack down on individual thieves but rather to go after the ring leaders who coordinate ongoing crimes.</p> <p>“Most of the risk is borne, with potential misdemeanor exposure, by the people going into the store to steal,” Lewis said, “and the people fencing the goods have a plentiful supply of people they can just churn through the system to go in and steal things for them.”</p>

	<p>Those stolen goods sometimes end up on street corners to be resold, including the black market that police recently shut down at 12th and Jackson in the Chinatown International District.</p> <p>Mandee Gartland, the manager at Seattle Shirt Company is encouraged by the new attention city leaders are giving this problem but said results are needed now. Thieves broke into the store last month and emptied the racks.</p> <p>“We need to see action,” Gartland said. “Talk's cheap.”</p> <p>No timeline on when the audit will be complete but it is expected to involve input from the local business community and will review how other cities respond.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/22 Lawsuit: jail sexual harassment, suicide
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/investigations/quileute-forks-inmate-reported-sexual-harassment-before-suicide/281-5f7ed38c-df6f-414b-8db9-6284dbfe234d
GIST	<p>FORKS, Wash. – In November 2019, Dawn Reid was at her home on the Quileute Indian Reservation in La Push when she took a tearful call from her oldest daughter, Kimberly Bender.</p> <p>Bender, 23, called from a pay phone near her jail cell at the Forks Correctional Facility, complaining of heroin withdrawals that felt unlike anything she’d experienced before.</p> <p>“Well, jail isn’t where we want to see you, Kimberly,” Reid told her daughter over the jail’s recorded phone line. “But if it saves your life, then that’s where you need to be.”</p> <p>Reid is the one who turned her daughter into police that November for a probation violation for possessing marijuana paraphernalia. Forcing Bender behind bars was a hard choice, Reid explained, but it felt like her only choice to keep her child alive.</p> <p>“That’s all I wanted was somebody to help her,” Reid, 43, said. “To help her get clean.”</p> <p>Bender, a single mother and Quileute tribal member, lived with complex mental health conditions, including bipolar disorder and depression, which, her mom said, stemmed from her being sexually assaulted as a child. As she struggled with drug addiction, she had been in and out of the Forks Correctional Facility seven times between April and December 2019.</p> <p>But it turns out that last stint in jail didn’t save her life.</p> <p>Bender died by suicide in her jail cell in December 2019. About three weeks earlier, police and hospital records reveal she tearfully reported to authorities that a Forks corrections officer, John Russell Gray, sexually harassed and stalked her in her cell at night – whispering lewd comments while she was incarcerated over the course of several months.</p> <p>“It’s starting to make me uncomfortable, being that I am the only female at the jail right now,” Bender told a tribal police officer, who recorded her Nov. 16, 2019 statement on his body camera.</p> <p>Investigators who interviewed Bender believed her story and cited multiple reasons for why they thought she was “telling the truth.” But at the conclusion of a swift internal review, the city’s police chief said they were “unable to substantiate” her allegations, even as the city fired the jail guard.</p> <p>Gray went on to secure another job working as a prison guard for the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC), where he’d worked for more than two decades before the city of Forks brought him on as an “emergency hire” for the Forks jail in April 2019.</p>

In February 2021, Gray was sentenced to 20 months in prison after pleading guilty to sexually assaulting four other women who were inmates at the Forks jail during the same time period that Bender was incarcerated there.

“They failed her miserably,” said Reid, who filed a federal lawsuit in October against Gray, the city of Forks and some of its employees. “She didn’t get treated like a victim.”

The lawsuit alleges, in part, that Bender’s death was “wrongful and unnecessary.” It blames the city for showing “negligence” to her “well-being, medical condition and conditions of confinement,” while Gray allegedly “sexually harassed and tormented” her and after she reported the abuse to law enforcement officials.

“I have not seen another case in which somebody like Kimberly Bender suffered such indignity or inhumanity,” said Gabe Galanda, the Seattle-based plaintiff attorney representing Bender’s family. “We’re asking for damages in an amount that will keep this from potentially never happening again to anybody in the city of Forks custody.”

Attorneys for Gray and the city of Forks declined KING 5 interview requests for this story. City leaders did not answer a list of written questions about the jail guard, Bender’s case or its policies on preventing and responding to sexual misconduct in the jail.

“The City does not comment on pending litigation,” wrote Megan Coluccio, the Seattle-based attorney representing the city and employees who are named defendants in the lawsuit.

In federal court documents, the city of Forks denied multiple allegations in the suit, including claims that officials were negligent in Kimberly’s death.

‘I won’t ask him for really anything’

About two weeks after Bender called her mom while suffering through heroin withdrawal in the jail, on Nov. 16, she was admitted to a Forks emergency room for a possible suicide attempt.

It was there that she told a Quileute tribal police officer, who recorded her tearful statement on his body camera, that Gray repeatedly made inappropriate comments, which made Bender so uncomfortable, she didn’t even want to use the bathroom when he was on duty.

“I won’t ask him for really anything,” Bender told the tribal officer. “And when I do ask him for something...He makes comments as to like, ‘Oh, what do I get out of it?’”

She said the guard implied she could use her inhaler as a sex toy, and he used a sexual innuendo when dispensing her nightly medication.

Medical records, provided by an attorney for Bender’s family, show she also spoke to a mental health professional after her possible suicide attempt. The doctor documented that the “scheduled jail officer for the night” triggers Bender’s post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that Bender was “nervous about (the) next guard coming on duty.”

“It’s hard to imagine someone more vulnerable,” Galanda, the plaintiff attorney, said. “Her last hours and days were lived in absolute terror.”

A medical professional at the Forks hospital cleared Bender to return to jail the same day, as the city of Forks immediately launched an investigation into her claims and placed Gray on administrative leave.

In a recorded interview with the lead investigator, Bender provided more detail – revealing she wasn’t the only inmate Gray preyed upon. She named two other women who were incarcerated at the Forks jail that fall. She said she believed Gray may have had physical sexual contact with them – possibly even paying at least one woman’s bail money to get out.

Bender did not report sexual assault by Gray.

The Forks police officer, in his Nov. 18, 2019 investigation report, explained that he believed Bender was telling the truth. He cited four reasons, including the fact that her story was “consistent” with her report to the tribal officer, and it was “free-flowing.” He wrote she exhibited “embarrassment over certain details,” and he also documented that he’d “personally heard” Gray use “some of the phrasing” Bender reported – in a different context.

The city finished its internal probe just days after Bender reported the behavior. The police chief, Mike Rowley, ruled her accusations were “unsubstantiated” because he said the city could find “no evidence to prove the allegations of misconduct,” which he characterized as “verbal unprofessionalism” instead of sexual harassment, according to a review of the city’s internal investigation report.

Forks officials terminated Gray on Nov. 18, 2019 – two days after Bender came forward. But he didn’t lose his job because of the alleged sexual harassment. City leaders cited his “probationary status” as the reason for ending his employment – a condition that allows the city to let go of new hires who aren’t working out.

“The allegations of verbal unprofessionalism was a factor in terminating the probationary employment of Officer John Gray,” Rowley wrote in the investigation report.

‘They could have asked more questions’

Advocates for survivors of sexual misconduct said it was the right move for the city to quickly open an internal review after Bender came forward. But the KING 5 investigators found the city fell short of examining the whole story.

Before concluding their investigation, city records show Forks officials never interviewed Gray.

“They could have asked more questions. They could have questioned him,” Reid, Bender’s mom, said. “Why wasn’t there more in the report?”

Investigators also didn’t speak with the two female inmates who Bender named as Gray’s possible victims, according to city and law enforcement records.

The two women later became part of Gray’s criminal case. They were among two of the four victims of sex crimes in the case that sent Gray to prison last year.

“They could have investigated this better,” Reid said. “It tells me that they were trying to sweep it under the rug.”

‘I did just kind of sweep it under the carpet’

Gray often worked the night shift alone, according to a review of his timecards and Forks shift schedules.

Earlier in 2019, his unusual behavior during the night shift caught the attention of a coworker. The cop reported he saw the guard where he didn’t belong – in the hallway with a female inmate, who “looked very uncomfortable” and had a “deer in the headlights look” when she was spotted with the jail guard, according to law enforcement records.

Gray’s supervisor, Sgt. Ed Klahn, documented the incident in an August 2019 observation report for Gray. But Klahn admitted later to a Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office deputy who investigated Gray’s criminal case that he let the incident slide.

“I did just kind of sweep it under the carpet because I thought he was such a hard worker,” Klahn said to the deputy in a recorded interview. “I just thought he just put himself in a bad situation trying to get the job done, so I counseled.”

‘I felt her disappointment’

On Dec. 7, 2019, 18 days after she told officers about her interactions with Gray, Bender made another phone call to her mom.

She ended it with “I love you” and went back to her jail cell, where she was left alone for about three hours, according to police records.

That evening, a Forks police officer found her dead in her cell.

It’s not clear if her suicide was connected to her reported harassment or if she knew the results of Forks’ internal review.

But Reid, who held a large memorial for her daughter this month, is convinced that the city didn’t do enough to protect Bender after she tearfully came forward.

“When you’re a mother you feel like you could feel every ounce of pain your child is feeling...I felt her fear. I felt her anger. I felt her disappointment,” she said. “The City of Forks can’t give her back to me, and that’s what I would want more than anything in this world is to have her back.”

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HEADLINE	02/22 Gunman charged: killing Portland protester
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/news/article/Police-identify-suspect-victim-in-Portland-16938359.php
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A 43-year-old man confronted protesters against police violence in a Portland, Oregon, park, told them to leave and then drew a pistol and opened fire, killing a woman and wounding four other people, a prosecutor said Tuesday.</p> <p>The description by Multnomah County Deputy District Attorney Mariel Mota of the Saturday night shooting was the first detailed official account of the bloodshed. It came as Oregon’s biggest city is experiencing a sharp rise in gun violence and after Portland was an epicenter in Black Lives Matter protests.</p> <p>Benjamin Smith “approached the demonstration and confronted several of its participants, yelling at them and demanding they leave the area,” Mota said in an affidavit, citing videos shot at the scene. After several protesters told him to leave them alone and go home, Smith said they should “make” him leave and approached a person aggressively, who pushed Smith back.</p> <p>Moments, later Smith drew his gun, Mota said.</p> <p>Brandy “June” Knightly, 60, was shot in the head at close range and died on the scene, Mota said. Smith stopped shooting only when someone fired back, striking him in the hip area, Mota said.</p> <p>Smith is in critical condition in a hospital under police guard. Smith was charged Tuesday by District Attorney Mike Schmidt with murder in the second degree with a firearm, four counts of attempted murder in the first degree with a firearm and assault.</p> <p>It wasn’t immediately clear if Smith had an attorney who could speak on his behalf.</p> <p>Knightly was remembered Tuesday as a woman who stood up for others.</p> <p>“As a community this is deeply wounding and distressing,” Portland City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty said “June was part of a group of unarmed women peacekeepers who supported racial justice demonstrations and engaged in compassionate work with the homeless.”</p>

One of the wounded was shot in the neck and is paralyzed from the neck down, Mota said. Two people were shot multiple times, including one of them in the abdomen, and the fourth wounded person was shot in the arm.

Smith's roommate, Kristine Christenson, told The Oregonian/OregonLive that Smith often criticized the Black Lives Matter movement, the COVID-19 mask requirement, crime in the neighborhood and homeless people living near the park by their apartment.

Knightly's friend Kathleen Saadat told the The Oregonian/OregonLive that Knightly was dedicated to acting on her values of justice and fairness.

"She was a warm, giving and kind person who spent time trying to think of things she could do to make the world better and to make herself better in the world," Saadat said.

Knightly's wife, Katherine Knapp, said Knightly first got involved in racial justice protests after George Floyd was killed by Minneapolis police in May 2020.

Social media flyers show that at the same time as the shooting, a march was planned for Amir Locke, a Black man who was fatally shot by police in Minneapolis.

Portland saw months of nightly protests in 2020 that often spiraled into violence following the murder by police of Floyd in Minneapolis. Portland became the center of the movement to defund the police, but the sustained protests in the city have largely faded away.

The city is now dealing with a plague of gun violence.

Last year was marked by record-high gun violence in Portland. Police and city officials say the increase in violence, which disproportionately affected Portland's Black community, was fueled by gang-related arguments, drug deals gone wrong and disputes among homeless people. The situation was exacerbated by the pandemic, economic hardships and mental health crises.

Portland recorded 90 homicides in 2021, shattering the city's previous high of 66, set more than three decades ago.

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HEADLINE	02/22 Jury: 3 guilty; Arbery hate crimes case
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/jury-reaches-verdict-ahmaud-arbery-hate-crimes-case/story?id=83041303
GIST	<p>A federal jury found Gregory McMichael, his son, Travis McMichael, and their neighbor, William "Roddie" Bryan, guilty on all counts in the Ahmaud Arbery hate crimes case.</p> <p>The U.S. District Court panel of eight white people, three Black people and one Hispanic person received the case on Monday afternoon and reached its decision on the eve of the second anniversary of Arbery's murder in the Satilla Shores neighborhood near Brunswick, Georgia.</p> <p>After deliberating for less than four hours, the jury convicted all three men of being motivated by racial hate in interference of Arbery's civil rights, and attempted kidnapping. Travis McMichael, 36, and his 64-year-old father were also convicted of carrying and brandishing a weapon during the commission of a crime of violence.</p> <p>Travis McMichael was also found guilty of discharging a firearm in relation to a crime of violence. "We got justice for Ahmaud in the federal and the state," Arbery's father, Marcus Arbery, said following the jury's announcement.</p> <p>Arbery's mother, Wanda Cooper-Jones, noted that the verdict came a day before the second anniversary of her son's death, saying, "Ahmaud will continue to rest in peace but he will now rest in power."</p>

"It's another milestone, another challenge that we've overcome," Cooper-Jones said. "Today is Super Tuesday. We got a guilty verdict on all charges for all murderers."

Cooper-Jones added that as a mother, she "will never heal" from the death of her son.

"They gave us a sense of a small victory," Cooper-Jones said. "We as a family will never get victory because Ahmaud is gone forever."

Cooper-Jones criticized the Department of Justice for a [plea deal](#) it had reached with the three men right before the start of the trial. The judge [refused to accept](#) the plea deals.

"I'm very thankful that you guys brought these charges of hate crime, but back on Jan. 31, you guys accepted a plea deal with these three murderers who took my son's life," Cooper-Jones said.

Cooper-Jones said she spoke to the assistant attorney general for the civil rights division of the Department of Justice, asking her to not accept a plea deal with defendants.

"I spoke to Kristen Clarke and the lead attorney Tara Lyons, begging them to please not take this plea deal. They ignored my cry. I begged them," Cooper-Jones said.

"Even after the family stood before the judge and asked them not to take this plea deal, the lead prosecutor stood up and asked the judge to ignore the family's cry. That's not justice for Ahmaud," she went on.

Attorney General Merrick Garland spoke to reporters following the jury's decision, saying the Department of Justice will not hesitate to act when individuals "commit violent acts that are motivated by bias or hate."

"No one in this country should have to fear the threat of hate-fueled violence. No one should fear being attacked or threatened because of what they look like, where they are from, whom they love, or how they worship. And no one should fear that if they go out for a run, they will be targeted and killed because of the color of their skin," Garland said.

He went on, "Although we welcome the jury's verdict, the only acceptable outcome in this matter would have been Mr. Arbery returning safely to his loved ones two years ago. His family and his friends should be preparing to celebrate his 28th birthday later this spring not mourning the second anniversary of his death, tomorrow. Ahmad Arbery should be alive today."

The McMichaels and Bryan were already convicted in state court of murdering the 25-year-old Black jogger and are serving life sentences. The McMichaels were not given the possibility of parole.

Arbery's family said they will now focus on making sure former Brunswick Judicial Circuit District Attorney Jackie Johnson is convicted of allegedly using her position in an attempt to shield the McMichaels from prosecution.

Police did not charge any of the now-convicted murderers immediately following the Feb. 23, 2020, shooting, and the McMichaels and Bryan remained free for more than two months until the cellphone video of the shooting was leaked online and Gov. Brian Kemp asked the Georgia Bureau of Investigation to take over the case. During the federal trial, prosecutors said Gregory McMichael leaked the video, which was taken by Bryan, in an ill-conceived effort to show his son shot Arbery in self-defense.

A grand jury in coastal Glynn County, Georgia, indicted Johnson in September on a felony count of violating her oath of office and hindering a law enforcement officer, a misdemeanor. Johnson, who once worked with Gregory McMichael, has pleaded not guilty.

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SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/german-man-helped-russia-acquire-chemicals-weapons-prosecutors-say-2022-02-22/
GIST	<p>BERLIN, Feb 22 (Reuters) - Germany's federal public prosecutor said on Tuesday it has filed charges against a German national for helping a Russian intelligence agency acquire chemicals intended for the production of weapons of mass destruction.</p> <p>It said the suspect, identified as Alexander S., managed a trade company in the eastern state of Saxony that since 2017 exported chemicals worth 1 million euros (\$1.13 million) to a front company operated by Russian intelligence agents.</p> <p>The suspect, who was arrested in May last year, knew all along he had exported dual-use chemicals needed in both civilian and military productions and failed to seek a special export permit as required by federal law, the Public Prosecutor General (GBA) said in a statement.</p> <p>"The Russian company was part of a network run by a Russian secret service agency conspiring to hide the military purpose of the goods by disguising as a civilian entity," the GBA said in a statement.</p> <p>The accusations relating to a Russian chemical weapons programme coincide with a crisis in Europe after Russia prepared to move troops into eastern Ukraine and built up its forces elsewhere along Ukraine's borders.</p> <p>Russia's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Previously, Russia has dismissed as baseless accusations that it possesses chemical weapons, saying it destroyed them long ago in line with the Chemical Weapons Convention.</p> <p>Germany says Russia used nerve agent Novichok to poison Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny. The same poison was used on Russian spy Sergei Skripal, Britain and the United States say.</p> <p>The prosecutors did not say if the suspect had rejected the accusations. They did not say when his trial at the Higher Regional Court in Dresden will start.</p> <p>The suspect is also accused of exporting electronic equipment worth 21,000 euros between Sept. 2019 and Nov. 2020 to an institute in Russia tasked with developing and manufacturing nuclear weapons.</p> <p>The GBA did not name the institute, which it said has been under EU sanctions since 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine.</p>
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